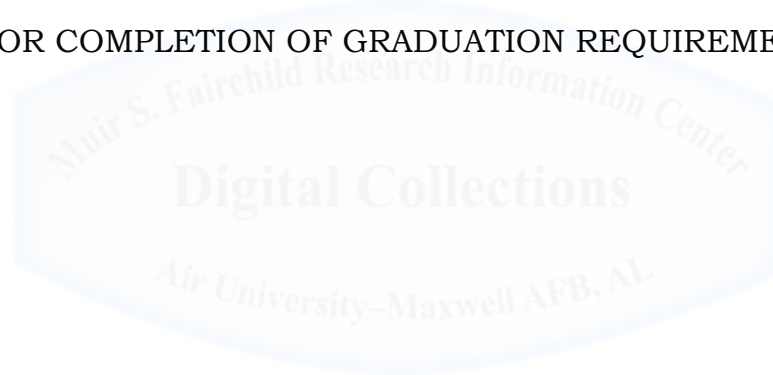


BIAFRA STILL MATTERS:
CONTESTED HUMANITARIAN AIRLIFT AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY
BY
MAJOR DAVID WALTER MYRICK

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF
THE SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES
FOR COMPLETION OF GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS



SCHOOL OF ADVANCED AIR AND SPACE STUDIES
AIR UNIVERSITY
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA
JUNE 2016

DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major David “Spoof” Myrick was a 2002 graduate of North Carolina State University (ROTC), where he majored in civil engineering. He has also earned a masters of arts in International Relations from Troy University and a masters of arts in National Security Studies from the Naval War College. His 13-year career on active duty with the Air Force has taken him to a variety of assignments and places. He served two operational tours as a C-17 pilot, first at McChord AFB then at Charleston AFB. While at Charleston, he graduated from the USAF C-17 Weapons School. Next, he served for three years as a planner for the Air Component of Joint Special Operations Command at Ft. Bragg NC before attending the US Navy’s College of Naval Command and Staff. Major Myrick has flown over 880 combat hours in the C-17 and has deployed many times to support Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, and SOCOM Joint Task Forces worldwide.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge several people without whose support and help I would not have attended SAASS or studied the Biafran Airlift. First I must thank Brigadier General Brian S. Robinson, Commander 618th AOC, for his leadership and mentorship while serving under his command in multiple assignments. Next is Lt Col (Ret) Tony Carr (himself a SAASS grad) with whom I served with in the 10th Airlift Squadron and served under his command in the 14th Airlift Squadron. Tony was a true leader that modeled honesty and a true concern for those under his charge. I believe these traits are the foundation of an influential command in today's Air Force. Without General Robinson's and Tony's encouragement, advice, and at times direct intervention in my career I would have missed many opportunities.

I especially want to thank Dr. Rich Muller for choosing to advise my topic (and me) this academic year. I hope that the buyer's remorse is minimal. Thankfully, Dr. Muller was much quicker at turning around drafts than I was. His knowledge and professionalism as a historian is matched only by his skillful and humorous manner of spurring his students to success. I would also like to thank Dr. James Kiras for serving as my reader. Dr. Kiras's knowledge of special operations and civil conflict was critical to my early topic decision and selection of sources. His humor and tolerance of my frequent rants were therapeutic. I am proud of this thesis and that pride is mostly a result of these two men's time and patience.

Above all, I want to express my sincere appreciation to my wife and my daughter for their love, patience, and understanding during this year. I have had to spend enormous amounts of time reading, writing, and taking naps (after staying up excessively late) instead of spending time with them. They are my motivation for living, working, and loving—and I am successful only because of their support and encouragement. This year both have constantly reminded me to stay focused on my Savior, Jesus Christ, as I have fought this good fight, and finished this particular race for his glory.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a historical analysis of the United States' involvement in the Biafran Airlift. The Biafran Airlift is the second largest humanitarian airlift operation in history behind the Berlin Airlift. Participants flew over 5300 sorties and delivered over 60,000 tons of humanitarian supplies to starving civilians in the breakaway state of Biafra during the Nigerian Civil War. Unlike the Berlin Airlift, *civilian* organizations conducted the operation. They did so despite violent military opposition from the Federal Military Government of Nigeria. The United States decided to remain neutral while later supporting the humanitarian operation. Such shades of gray foreshadowed many of the dilemmas the US faces today in the international security environment. The United States Government was neck deep in an increasingly unpopular conflict in Vietnam and the Cold War but found time to conduct genuine strategic dialogue over the crisis. This thesis ultimately determines if the Biafran Airlift is a persuasive case for the United States to utilize contested humanitarian airlift as an instrument of national power. The pull of American liberal idealism manifested itself for the first time in the international media coverage that projected a civil war onto the global conscience. Domestic action groups pressured the White House and Congress for action. By synthesizing modern doctrine and policy for foreign humanitarian assistance, this thesis looks back at the Biafran Airlift and derives three implications (technical, environmental, political) for today's policy makers. The significance of the Biafran Airlift is not lost on a Syria scenario today, but perhaps more important is the glimpse into how policy squares with action for today's security environment flush with failed states and civil conflict.

CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
DISCLAIMER	ii
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
1 INTRODUCTION.	1
2 CONFLICT BACKGROUND	9
3 DOCTRINE, POLICY, AND GUIDANCE FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE	23
4 THE AIRLIFT	39
5 THE UNITED STATES AND BIAFRA	56
6 IMPLICATIONS	78
GLOSSARY	89
BIBLIOGRAPHY	92

Illustrations

Table

1 Relief Options NSSM 11- Memo from H. Kissinger to R. Nixon . .	63
--	----

Chapter One – Introduction

A common thread in many assessments of today's global environment is the claim that its challenges are both exceedingly complex and unprecedented.¹ Globalization, information, technology, markets, human society, and violence combine to form cyclones of disruption that interact with the timeless narrative of human competition, balance of power, and geography. The current civil war in Syria and its byproducts of human suffering and refugees are significant challenges for the United States of America's (US) leaders, policy makers, and armed services. The daunting challenges of the Syrian war include: aspects of major power competition; the pitfalls of intervention in a civil war fueled by significant ethnic and religious tensions; and the prospect of (more) distracting, lengthy, and costly foreign wars.

Complex they certainly are; but are the challenges in Syria unprecedented? Regarding the higher workings of foreign policy, certainly not. From the US perspective, the Syrian crisis shares many attributes with the Nigerian Civil War, fought from 6 July 1968 to 15 January 1970. An effective blockade by the Nigerian Federal Government led to mass starvation inside the breakaway state of Biafra. The US declared an arms embargo against both sides and did not recognize Biafra's independence. Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon directed their staffs to get the starving Biafran children off

¹ Executive Office of the President of the United States of America, *National Security Strategy* (2015), 2,4,9.

The Department of Defense, *The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review* (2014), 6,22.

American television sets.² Nixon campaigned on the issue and genuinely wanted to take humanitarian action in Nigeria.³ In the absence of significant action from outside (state) powers, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and what eventually became Joint Church Aid (JCA) filled the gap, flying some 5,300 airlift sorties delivering over 60,000 tons of relief supplies into Biafra.⁴ These were separate efforts, with the ICRC constraining its actions along lines of legality and principle. JCA was the culmination of efforts by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) predominately led by Caritas Internationalis and Nordchurchaid. These organizations (and at times individual actors) became the funneling mechanism for getting funding and aid to Biafra, including significant support from the United States. The Biafran Airlift was not a formal, planned, or rehearsed mission from the outset. It was instead a grassroots effort that grew, gaining momentum to arrive at a scale of effort only exceeded in history by the Berlin Airlift.

During the Berlin Airlift, military forces executed the operation without direct interference from the enemy. In contrast, during the Biafran Airlift *civilians* delivered food while being shot out of the air and bombed on the ground. The United States Air Force (USAF) has a long and commendable history of humanitarian airlift, but only a small fraction of those operations have occurred in hostile or contested environments.⁵ What airlift lacks in efficiency and economy it makes up for in access, flexibility, and small presence at the offload point. Supporting an enclave from the air is often the only option when facing

² Philip Gourevitch, "Alms Dealers: Can You Provide Humanitarian Aid without Facilitating Conflicts?" *The New Yorker*. October 11, 2010.

³ Conversation between Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon. Transcript of conversation. 18 Jul. 1969. "Document 90." U.S. Department of State: Office of the Historian.

⁴ Michael I. Draper, *Shadows: Airlift and Airwar in Biafra and Nigeria, 1967-1970* (Aldershot, Hants England: Hikoki Publications, 1999), 277.

⁵ Daniel L. Haulman, *The United States Air Force and Humanitarian Airlift Operations 1947-1994* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 2015).

the tyranny of distance and political constraints.⁶ For an armed actor to target opposing forces, they must possess the capability, intent, and opportunity to complete the kill chain. Utilizing speed and a smaller footprint, airlift can deny the enemy the opportunity part of the equation. Doing so lowers (not eliminates) risk to forces and can make a strategy more acceptable to decision makers. Berlin showed us that humanitarian airlift, as an operational concept, was possible in the black and white world of containment. Biafra shows us what it looks like when there are shades of gray and plenty of messy, difficult choices.

On 16 February 2016, AP Journalist Karin Laub wrote, “Sieges were widely used for centuries as a military tool — from Jerusalem to Leningrad and Sarajevo — and aren't defined outright as a war crime. However, recent images of emaciated civilians in blockaded areas, such as the Syrian town of Madaya, have prompted global outrage.”⁷ Furthermore, on 2 February 2016 US Secretary of State John Kerry, when commenting on Syria, said the following:

Finally, our coalition has a profound responsibility to answer the urgent, the compelling, the stunning – to address the absolutely stunning images and reality of life for real people on the ground in Syria. This is required by international law, my friends, and it is required by simple human decency. The situation on the ground for the Syrian people is unfathomable. We haven't seen a catastrophe like this since World War II and it's unfolding before our eyes. People in Madaya eating leaves and grass or animals of one kind or another that they manage to capture. People who have not had a resupply for months. A hundred and thirteen requests by the United Nations to provide supplies and only 13 have been granted by the Assad regime. Starvation as a tactic of

⁶ Roger G. Miller, *To Save a City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 2000), 48.

⁷ Karin Laub, “Siege Warfare in Syria Revives debate over Ancient Tactic,” Associated Press, February 17, 2016, available at <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/859b168c4d6b493bb803bb78dd8fe091/siege-warfare-syria-revives-debate-over-ancient-tactic>

war is against the laws of war and it is being used every single day as a tactic by the Assad regime.⁸

Kerry further called on the belligerents to allow distribution of humanitarian aid. “The Syrian regime has a responsibility – in fact, all parties to the conflict have a duty to facilitate humanitarian access to Syrians in desperate need. And this has to happen not a week from now, not two weeks, not in a month. It shouldn’t even be a bargaining chip. It ought to happen in the first days and I hope everybody here will help us to make that happen.”⁹

Laub leaps from Leningrad to Sarajevo while Kerry goes straight back to World War II (WWII). Both skip right over the crisis in Biafra during the Nigerian Civil War. Some of that is certainly political, as the US avoids calling out a genuine partner in West Africa on a difficult part of its history. As bad as things are in Syria right now, the humanitarian situation (fortunately) has not reached the scale of disaster seen in Biafra. However, if denial of access to humanitarian aid continues, then Syria displays all the potential to be ‘another Biafra’. Another trend developing is the reduction of avenues for refugees to flow out of Syria. Neighboring countries have absorbed massive amounts of Syrian refugees, and many appear to be at their limit of capacity.¹⁰ However, approximately 6.5 million Syrians remain internally displaced inside the Syrian borders.¹¹ For many reasons, including fear of terrorism and domestic instability, many large and prosperous countries further out

⁸ John Kerry, “Remarks at the Ministerial Meeting of the Small Group of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL,” available at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2016/02/251992.htm>

⁹ Kerry, John Remarks at the Ministerial Meeting of the Small Group of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2016/02/251992.htm>

¹⁰ Ongoing USG Humanitarian Assistance Syria- Complex Emergency Last Updated 02/04/16 https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/syria_map_02-04-2016.pdf

¹¹ USAID, Syrian Complex Emergency Update.

have been reducing the number of refugees they allow in, some drastically.

Military planners should be listening very carefully to these comments. The state of the refugee situation indicates a potentially much greater humanitarian crisis evolving in Syria. Since starting kinetic operations against the Islamic State (ISIS) on 8 August 2014, Department of Defense (DOD) operations have averaged a daily cost of \$11.6 million.¹² If we are indeed settling into times where security concerns in many parts of the world are tackled with use of force directly for political ends, the outcome “is not war in the Clausewitzian sense, but effectively a continuation of normal political activity, which is endless.”¹³ In such an environment, the United States risks being dragged “into endless conflicts that go beyond political utility, not least regarding their human and financial cost.”¹⁴ Surely, there are alternate means and ways to advance US interests separate from invasions and bombing campaigns. The Biafran Airlift sheds significant light on the utilizing humanitarian airlift to address complex emergencies.

This thesis seeks to answer the following question: Does the Biafran Airlift offer a relevant example as the US moves forward in using contested humanitarian airlift as an instrument of national power? Identifying implications from Biafra for current and future operations proceeds in three main steps. Following the conflict background in Chapter Two, Chapter Three will aid the evaluation of the airlift by presenting modern guidance, mainly Joint Publication 3-29: *Foreign*

¹² United States Department of Defense, “Operation INHERENT RESOLVE : Targeted Operations Against ISIL Terrorists” available at http://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0814_Inherent-Resolve

¹³ Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up: Twenty-First Century Combat as Politics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 235.

¹⁴ Simpson, 236.

Humanitarian Assistance, the Sphere Handbook and United Nations directives.

JP 3-29 serves as Joint Doctrine across the spectrum of foreign humanitarian assistance (FHA). A group of NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent founded the Sphere Project in 1997 to produce a set of universal minimum standards in core areas of humanitarian response. The resulting Sphere Handbook aims “to improve the quality of humanitarian response in situations of disaster and conflict, and to enhance the accountability of the humanitarian system to disaster-affected people.”¹⁵ Biafra relief was a fundamental starting point, or at least the phoenix, of the modern humanitarian industry.¹⁶ Additionally, what has been termed the “CNN effect” also came of age with the Nigerian Civil War and is essential to any further discussion of policy and strategic communication.¹⁷

Following the doctrine and policy review, Chapter Four will cover the Biafran Airlift in detail. The airlift matured into two main efforts consisting of the ICRC and JCA airlifts and distribution networks. Additionally, there were plenty of other small efforts on the periphery of the conflict. The scale and audacity of the Biafran Airlift is even more impressive when one considers it was ultimately illegitimate by today’s standards. Chapter Four displays the unique challenges of providing humanitarian assistance in a complex emergency, and demonstrates that good intentions are not enough. Groups still need adequate tools and knowledge to be successful.

Next, Chapter Five analyzes the US response to the Nigerian Civil War and more specifically the humanitarian crisis in Biafra. A

¹⁵ The Sphere Project, *The Sphere Handbook 2011: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response*, Pap/Cdr edition. (Practical Action, 2011), ii.

¹⁶ Gourevitch, 1.

¹⁷ Suzanne Franks, *Reporting Disasters: Famine, Aid, Politics and the Media* (London: Hurst, 2013), 49.

significant amount of documents were declassified or released in the first decade of this century that reveal the impetus for action over Biafra. These documents also show the influences on decisions and interaction among organizations of the US government and the international system over Biafra. FHA should be a whole of government act, and deconstructing the desires, possibilities, and actions--by whom and when in this case--will benefit future practitioners. It can aid Theater Commanders, Commander, Air Mobility Command, Commander, United States Transportation Command, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as they anticipate the environment and present options for the President and Congress.

Also included in Chapter Five is an examination of the Department of Defense's efforts to provide options for US leadership on Nigeria. USAF relief operations bookended the crisis. The Federal Nigerian Government thwarted the first USAF relief flight from 7-9 June 1968.¹⁸ After the fall of Biafra, the USAF executed Operation GALLANT LIFT, from 27 January to 10 February 1970, in coordination with the Nigerian Government.¹⁹ Uncovering these operations and the planning in response to National Security Council (NSC) and Congressional taskings throughout the crisis furthers the efforts of the previous section.

The areas of implication from this thesis are threefold. First, the uniqueness of the Biafran Airlift provides a phenomenal opportunity to test current doctrine's applicability in an environment akin to what United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) recently defined as "the gray zone." Captain Philip Kapusta's white paper defines gray zone challenges as "competitive interactions among and within state and non-state actors that fall between the traditional war and peace duality.

¹⁸ Haulman, 302.

¹⁹ Haulman, 305.

Ambiguity about the nature of the conflict, opacity of the parties involved, or uncertainty about the relevant policy and legal frameworks” characterize the gray zone.²⁰ Humanitarian relief in the unique form of humanitarian airlift emerges as an option distinct from humanitarian intervention (use of force to compel) as an effective way to mitigate disaster and suffering in environments akin to the gray zone.

The second implication concerns issues of grand strategy and policy awareness for military leaders and planners. The Biafran Airlift and US action during the Nigerian Civil War is a significant opportunity to review the policy implications of Jon Western’s study of Somalia and Bosnia.²¹ Western argues that “if we are to develop sophisticated strategies for responding to regional and civil violence...we must understand not only when intervention can be effective but the conditions and processes by which intervention is implemented as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy. In short, we need to understand why the United States intervenes in some instances but not in others.”²² Western concludes that: there is no universal doctrine that applies to humanitarian intervention decisions; assessing the likelihood of success is extremely subjective; US military officials have a significant amount of influence on the process; and finally, the CNN effect is much more nuanced in its influence.²³

The third implication involves emerging technology. How might unmanned aircraft and associated throughput and logistical technologies affect the theory, practice, and doctrine of humanitarian relief? Since risk to personnel, risk of escalation, and perceptions of neutrality or use

²⁰ Philip Kapusta, United States Special Operations Command, White Paper: *The Gray Zone* (9 September 2015), 1.

²¹ Jon Western, “Sources of Humanitarian Intervention: Beliefs, Information, and Advocacy in the U.S. Decisions on Somalia and Bosnia,” *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Spring, 2002), pp. 112-142

²² Western, 138.

²³ Western, 141

of force were significant variables in policymaking and operations in Biafra, current and emerging technologies in this realm may be transformative. By briefly overlaying observations from the US's global remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) campaign on the lessons learned from the Biafran Airlift, a major implication emerges. Unmanned cargo aircraft address several current shortfalls to humanitarian airlift, and have the potential to ensure it continues to be a consistent and effective instrument of national power. This thesis will examine this claim and suggest how this mission area should shape acquisition and doctrine in the next five years.



Chapter Two – Conflict Background

Just as the Biafran Airlift occurred in the context of the Nigerian Civil War, the Civil War occurred in the context of Nigeria's modern history--a history characterized by rapid change. Post WWII hopes led to Independence from Great Britain in 1960. Attaining unity and advancement to Western standards without their British sovereigns proved to be unsettling business. The coups of 1966 followed, and led to civil war. The decolonization process in Nigeria was lengthy. Great Britain labored mightily to account for ethnic diversity through the complex systems of government and power sharing it left behind. Many expected the post-colonial states of Africa to struggle or implode in the coming decades. Nigeria was different. Due to its size, economic potential, and large British-trained bureaucracy and elites, hopes and expectations for young Nigeria were high.¹ At least, that is one perspective.

This thesis strives for brevity in sketching out the backdrop of Nigeria in the late 1960s in order to focus on the lessons of foreign humanitarian assistance during the Biafran Airlift, particularly those lessons valuable to United States policy makers. In doing so, it risks what Joseph Okpaku, editor, and contributor to *Nigeria: Dilemma of Statehood* described as rushing "to pontificate on matters which these men (western scholars) are incompetent to comprehend."² Okpaku attributes this to "as much because of their embarrassingly minimal knowledge of the place and the people as because of their inability or unwillingness to understand the depth of the African mind."³ Okpaku asserts that such scholars present "simple, easily consumable

¹ Peter Baxter, *Biafra: the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970*. Africa@war. Vol. 16, (Solihull, West Midlands, England: Helion & Company Limited, 2014), 8

² Joseph Ohiomogben Okpaku, *Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies*, vol. 12, *Nigeria: Dilemma of Nationhood: an African Analysis of the Biafran Conflict* (New York: Third Press, 1972), 4.

³ Okpaku, 4.

interpretations” to the unsuspecting reader whose access to Africa is entirely dependent on them. Of Okpaku’s claim, this and the following chapters are likely guilty, but in reality so were the perceptions of most of the groups and politicians that backed the Biafran Airlift from afar.

Nigeria exhibits a complex ethnic and linguistic makeup. Hausa, Igbo⁴, Yoruba, Ibibio, Edo, Fulfulde, and Kanuri are the seven primary languages of the *several hundred* spoken in Nigeria. Of these Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo are the most prevalent languages and correspond to dominant ethnic groups. In modern Nigeria, ethnicity “emerged as *the* principle of primordialism” (trumping race, religion, language, and territory).⁵ The importance of ethnic groups deepened with the introduction of democratic process and even more so with federalism.⁶ In general, the Hausa-Fulani group dominated the country north of the Benue-Niger River confluence, while the Yoruba-Igbo groups held sway in the south. The south further divides with the Yoruba occupying the territories west of the Niger River and the Igbo those to the east. The Yoruba and the Igbo being non-Muslim peoples, widened the chasm separating north and south as Nigerians looked forward to independence.⁷

Following WWI, the Igbo emerged as the ethnic group most amenable to adopting modern British social and economic practices. In the South, they dominated the civil service and the blue-collar levels of

⁴ In older documents it’s common to see the term “Ibo” used to describe the Igbo language group and tribe. The proper and modern spelling is “Igbo” based on the Igbo alphabet as “Ibo” is considered the antiquated anglicized spelling. For this thesis, ‘Igbo’ will be used including in direct quotations from sources where it is substituted for the other form.

⁵ Peter Ekeh, “Citizenship and Political Conflict: A Sociological Interpretation of the Nigerian Crisis”, in *Nigeria: Dilemma of Nationhood: an African Analysis of the Biafran Conflict*, ed. Joseph Ohiomogben Okpaku, *Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies*, vol. 12, (New York: Third Press, 1972), 90.

⁶ Ekeh, 90.

⁷ Baxter 8.

industry, teaching, and small business.⁸ The army and police forces filled their junior and senior non-commissioned officer (NCO) levels with Igbos in a similar manner.⁹ In the north, the situation was less conducive to such development. There were insufficient numbers of educated workers and bureaucrats to run the systems of government, key institutions, and utilities. The exclusivity and xenophobia of Islam in the north contributed to this state, but there was also little incentive to compete or assimilate when the British guaranteed a share of power and resources. The resistance to education allowed southerners to fill the vacuum as the British transitioned out.¹⁰ Igbos, in particular, migrated north to fill the key economic and administrative posts and therefore prospered in major cities in the north. Local business became the realm of Igbo, as did emerging political and social organizations. Among this professional class, the incubation of nationalist sentiment in Nigeria occurred. By the 1950s, the indigenous northern ethnic groups began to resent the cultural exclusivity and influence of the Igbo "carpetbaggers."

The British certainly understood these dynamics and incorporated them into their design for a Nigerian Federation. Nigerian nationalists wavered back and forth on the matter of federation and were less zealous than many of their African counterparts on forcing independence. It was likely clear to them that the English planned to transition Nigeria to an independent state. The only real question was the design and character of such a state.

The Lyttelton Constitution, formalized in 1954, confirmed the federal structure of Nigeria. Many in the South had argued for a unitary state while the North had viewed too close linkage with the South with

⁸Gould, Michael. *The Struggle for Modern Nigeria: the Biafran War, 1967-1970*. International Library of African Studies. Vol. 35, London: I.B. Tauris, 2012, 13.

⁹Gould, 13.

¹⁰Gould, 12.

suspicion and tended to be lukewarm on independence in general. By the end of the 1950s, the territory had so tangibly polarized into three regions that there was no real room for any other solution.¹¹ Nigerian scholar Dr. Peter Ekeh stresses that there was no historical justification or precedent for the preeminence of Hausa-Fulani, Yorubas, and Igbos.¹² The new federal structure of Nigeria consisted of a strengthened federal legislature supported by three regional legislatures. In effect, the new constitution deprived half of the country's population of full citizenship opportunities overnight. "Majority Nigerians" were Hausa-Fulani in the North, Yorubas in the West and Eastern Igbos.¹³ "Minority Nigerians" were those with no ethnic affiliations with the big three.¹⁴ "Marginal Nigerians" were those who were affiliated with majority groups but located in a different region. In 1957, Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa became Chief Minister under the ceremonial and watchful office of the governor general, who remained a British official.¹⁵

With a relatively smooth transition of power in Ghana in 1957 behind them, one could understand British optimism in Nigeria. The discovery of oil in 1957 in the Delta offered a way to diversify and stabilize Nigeria's economy for the near future.¹⁶ Significant effort had gone into the transition, and if Nigeria could overcome its ethnic divides the most educated indigenous workforce and government in Africa would be off and running towards a productive society.

It soon became clear, however, that the federal structure defined by the Lyttelton Constitution acknowledged the three-part ethnic division in the country but did little to mend the systemic problems associated

¹¹ Baxter, 9-10.

¹² Minorities not in the "big three" accounted for over 20 million of a total population of 54 million and lived on more land area that contained roughly 90% of Nigeria's resources. Ekeh, 95.

¹³ Ekeh, 95.

¹⁴ Ekeh, 95.

¹⁵ Baxter, 10.

¹⁶ Gould, 128.

with it.¹⁷ The 1959 general election led to a government that lasted for six years, allowing enough time for the British to transition from governors to contractors of lucrative business arrangements. The scale and speed of these transactions induced significant corruption at all levels of government.¹⁸

Almost immediately political crises and ethnic rallying started fracturing the federation. Western Nigeria entered a state of emergency, and the other regions saw an irrevocable change to dirty politics and aggressive attempts to gain power and control over federal and regional resources. Two attempts to conduct a census and reestablish some sense of order failed in 1962 and 1963.¹⁹ The federal government showed no ability nor desire to fight corruption at its level or in the regional governments, further compromising the political process. The ineptness of the Federal government stemmed from most majority groups feeling as strong an attachment to their regional bodies as they did their ethnic groups.²⁰ Dr. Ekeh highlights that it was “usual to characterize Nigerians as either an Igbo, Yoruba, or Hausa, or as a supporter of the Igbo, Yoruba, or Hausa.”²¹ Thus, in each region, the majorities tended towards the regional services and the minorities and marginal Nigerians steered toward the federal services. The result was that the tension between civil and ethnic ties manifested directly into conflict between the federal center and the regions. Out of this, all regions developed secessionist tendencies, and Ekeh states that from 1954 on, secession was “a household word in Nigeria.”²² The marginal and minority populations effectively balanced against secession until the Biafra case.

¹⁷ Baxer, 10 .

¹⁸ Gould, 1.

¹⁹ A H M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 19.

²⁰ Ekeh 98

²¹ Ekeh 96

²² Ekeh 100

By 1965, the need for an intervention was clear.²³ January 1966 would produce such an intervention, in the form that would dominate Nigeria for decades to come—a military coup.²⁴

Early Saturday morning, 15 January 1966, five majors in the Nigerian Army set out to upend the government of Nigeria. After forcing their way into the government compound, Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna and a small contingent of troops kidnapped and later killed Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa.²⁵ Elsewhere in the country, similar coordinated actions were underway. Rebel troops under the command of Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu assaulted the home of the Northern Premier, the Sarduna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, with heavy weapons, and Major Nzeogwu shot Bello himself.²⁶

Similar scenarios played out in the other regions as Northerners killed several high-ranking military members. The somewhat haphazard execution of the coup was evident when The General Officer Commanding Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, perhaps the most critical target, escaped unharmed.²⁷ Aguiyi-Ironsi crushed the coup, and the military took control of the country with him as the leader. Though the coup was not an ethnic movement, many of the coup's leaders were Igbo as was Aguiyi-Ironsi.²⁸ In the aftermath, many in the west and the north loathed an Igbo head of state.²⁹

For Aguiyi-Ironsi, assuming power after the coup was the culmination of an equally meteoric rise to general officer in the military.

²³ Kirk-Greene, 5.

²⁴ Gould, 5.

²⁵ Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture, 1966-1976* (New York: Algora Pub., 2009), 47

²⁶ Siollun, 44

²⁷ Siollun, 42.

²⁸ Gould, 5.

²⁹ Baxter, 12.

As head of state, Aguiyi-Ironsi's "signature failing during the six months that he was in office was his determination to be fair-minded, honest, ethnically impartial and manifestly transparent, all of which runs so contrary to the Nigerian political mindset that his tenure was doomed almost before it began."³⁰

Aguiyi-Ironsi stood up a government commission to assess what had gone wrong, and the members settled on the federation structure, pushing for unification reform. In late May 1966, the new government issued the Unification Decree turning the regions into provinces and codified the *de facto* post-coup structure of military control.³¹ The decree was too much for the Northern elites who pressured the northern military governor with secession threats. The murmurs of discontent with the Igbo turned into hatred and a storm erupted in the north on 29 May. Organized gangs hunted down and killed easterners with whatever weapons they could find. The attacks started in the northern capital of Kaduna but very quickly spread to Kano, Jos, Zaria, Gusau, Sokoto, Katsina, and Bauchi.³²

In the context of the Nigerian Civil War, this wave of spontaneous violence is paramount. Southerners (especially Igbos) experienced the type of institutionalized violence that always seemed palpable in modern Nigeria. First the British, and later political guarantees of Northern hegemony in the federation, kept these behaviors in check. The first time the balance of power wavered, a repeatable pattern of violence erupted that would only grow in severity and scale. These pogrom-like killings would renew the discussion of secession in the east and create an

³⁰ Baxter, 15.

³¹ Siollun, 66.

³² Baxter, 12.

environment where security in modern Nigeria became a binary consideration of ethnicity and survival.

Often disputed when discussing the events of 1966, the use of the words “pogrom” and “genocide” are still in question today. Dr. Ekeh dismisses the claim of “pogrom” as an eloquent Biafran argument. However, he admits that the “Northern killings of 1966 have been some of the most terrifying experiences in the country,” and “it is clear most of the casualties were people from the East, Igbos and non-Igbos (mostly Ibibos, Annangs, and Ijaws).”³³ The purge lasted through June with low estimates at 3,000 dead. There was not a forceful response from the Aguiyi-Ironsi regime, and the northern political elite took notice while escalating political demands. On 29 July, army officers from northern Nigeria instigated another coup that ousted the Aguiyi-Ironsi regime. Aguiyi-Ironsi and seven other senior ranking military leaders met their end violently.

Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon emerged as the leader of the armed forces and eventually the head of state. In the aftermath of the coup, Northerners systematically and often brutally killed men and officers of Eastern origin. Initially, the toll was somewhere around 300 men. However, the violence evolved into a complete effort to find and kill Igbo military members and then shifted to civilians of eastern origins in orchestrated killings that would lead to around 30,000 dead.³⁴ A mass exodus of easterners from the north and west brought with them the idea that there was a determined attempt to extinguish the Igbo people in all of Nigeria. Eastern secession seemed inevitable. The eastern military governor, Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu,

³³ Ekeh, 53.

³⁴ Baxter, 15.

privately had accepted this reality, knowing it would also mean civil war.³⁵

The Nigerian Civil War possesses much nuance and complexity. When trying to explain the conflict's trajectory, it is worth highlighting that the personalities of Gowon and Ojukwu were as much at odds as the Hausa and Igbo. The 34-year-old Ojukwu was something of a political prodigy. The son of a wealthy Igbo executive, he attended colleges in Surrey and Oxford as well as military schools at Eaton Hall, Hythe, and Westminster. Ojukwu considered Gowon his inferior and an illegitimate military leader. Gowon was a graduate of Sandhurst, where Great Britain commissions its own army officers after they receive undergraduate degrees from civilian institutions. However, he was of humbler origins and lacked the political flair and creativity of Ojukwu. Gowon's desire to prove his worth and Ojukwu's conceit shaped the conflict writ large, and in very direct ways the Biafran Airlift.³⁶

A more pressing crisis for Ojukwu and the eastern province was the mass flow of refugees numbering well over 1,000,000 people fleeing the north and west of the country. These individuals pressured already dense territory and tight resources. The refugees shared the horrors of their escape, making easterners feel trapped in a country where their existence was threatened or at best temporarily tolerated because of the eastern oil. The refugee movement brought many experienced Igbo politicians and powerbrokers back to the east.³⁷ They provided the backbone of a capable government but likely forced Ojukwu's hand on secession into what would soon be a nascent Biafra.

³⁵ Baxter, 15.

³⁶ Gould, 149-183.

³⁷ John Oyinbo, *Nigeria: Crisis and Beyond* (London: C. Knight, 1971), 103.

Through the end of 1966 and the opening months of 1967 talks took place in Aburi that produced an agreement that redistributed power from the center and reorganized the military roughly according to majority composition by province. However, once the parties left the conference they translated the agreement according to their political needs. Subsequent unilateral declarations by Gowon (Decree 8) produced loopholes enabling the north to maintain power.³⁸ In response, Ojukwu declared that all revenue from the east would stay there to fund costs associated with the refugee crisis. To head off secession, Gowon countered by breaking the country into 12 states. As Gowon moved out on planning the latest reorganization, the Eastern Assembly met and officially empowered Ojukwu to secede. Ojukwu accepted the authority and on 30 May 1967 declared secession as the State of Biafra. It was now up to the Federal government to respond, perhaps by revisiting the Aburi agreement. The Supreme Military Council's decision became clear when on 6 July the Nigerian military began assaulting the town of Ogoja with artillery.³⁹

Initially labeled a police action, the Nigerian military high command's basic strategy was to attack key cities on the northern and northeast borders of Biafra to clear the way for capturing the capital of Enugu.⁴⁰ This plan relied on the assumption that the fall of Enugu would quickly end the matter of Biafra as a state. Though they were outfitted for peacekeeping and internal security, the Nigerian military and Federal government were nonetheless confident in their ability to subdue Biafra. Their predictions of victory timelines often were in days, not months. However, the combination of misplaced bravado, poor

³⁸ Explanatory note attached to "Decree No. 8 of 1967, Constitution (Suspension and Modification), Supplement to the Official Gazette of the Federation of Nigeria, vol. 54, A 91-9" in A H M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 401

³⁹ Baxter 17-18.

⁴⁰ Gould, XVII.

planning, and an inaccurate assessment of their enemy would instead produce a conflict that lasted until January 1970.

The Biafrans could offer little resistance in the face of Nigerian artillery and mortar assaults, and city after city fell. Ojukwu took the early losses in stride. By most accounts, his strategy focus at this phase was almost completely political. Ojukwu sought to capitalize on the propaganda of the massive conventional Nigerian military action to shift the local and global populace closer to recognizing Biafra. Western secession would further fracture the federation. Locally Biafrans hoped that the western province would even possibly join with it to fight the north but as time moved along it became clear the west was cautiously backing the north.⁴¹ After this initial phase, Ojukwu's aim seemed to have shifted away from succession to a stronger autonomous role within an updated federation. Unfortunately, the fact that the oil and associated revenues came from the east kept the stakes high enough for the north that they were compelled to defeat Biafra, not accommodate it.⁴²

As for international political opinion, a frank assessment is that it varied little throughout the war. Major powers showed varying degrees of sympathy but remained resolute in their refusal to recognize the breakaway state. Great Britain and its Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, influenced this stance significantly.⁴³ United States foreign policy, under Presidents Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon, fluctuated on whether to intervene or how to provide aid on moral grounds, but mostly followed the British lead.

⁴¹ Baxter, 19-20.

⁴² Baxter, 20.

⁴³ Baxter, 20.

The Organization for African Unity's (OAU) stance tempered the international response. In the context of delicate colonial era boundaries and transitions, the countries of the OAU did not want more attention on their internal matters nor for the conflict to spread. Thus, the OAU labeled the Nigerian Civil War an internal matter and withheld recognition of Biafra. Eventually, only Ivory Coast, Zambia, Tanzania, and Gabon recognized the breakaway state.⁴⁴

In the context of the Cold War, the two superpowers aligned on Nigeria. By the late 1960s, the Soviet Union had increased operations and commerce Africa enough to concern the US. The superpowers had backed opposing sides in Mozambique, Angola, and the Congo but the USSR saw an opportunity to gain influence in Nigeria when the British refused to provide aircraft to the Nigerian military. Britain still provided the majority of other war material to Nigeria as their interests and pride clearly rested with survival of the Nigerian State. The US focused on Vietnam, and the scale and intensity of the mushrooming quagmire there left room for little else.

The above focus on causes, politics, and context is necessary to understand the analysis of the Biafran Airlift and US foreign humanitarian assistance to Biafra covered in the following two chapters. Before we transition to those assessments, a brief overview of the phases of the war is also necessary to frame the timeline and environment in which the relief effort occurred.

The war consisted of five main phases starting with the initial two-pronged Nigerian Assault.⁴⁵ The Biafrans quickly answered with a surge into the mid-west region that almost reached Lagos.⁴⁶ The Biafran

⁴⁴ Baxter, 21.

⁴⁵ John de St Jorre, *The Brothers' War: Biafra and Nigeria* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), 148.

⁴⁶ de St Jorre, 165.

counterattack slowed the Nigerian efforts significantly. By June of 1968, the Nigerians recovered Port Harcourt, Bonny Island and advanced around to the east through Calabar to link up with forces in the north.⁴⁷ At this point, resupply was only by a fragile air corridor from Portugal to Biafra.⁴⁸ The Biafran enclave shrunk incrementally after a large southern offensive out of Port Harcourt in the second half of 1968 and northern offensives in the first half of 1969. The final phase was an offensive that started in December 1969 and ended the war by mid-January of 1970. Such an early and comprehensive (complete naval and land blockades, with frustrated air access) siege of Biafra resulted in widespread hunger and malnutrition. Large numbers of internally displaced people and refugees from the north and west pressed into a shrinking enclave making matters worse.

Whether the Nigerians pursued a “starvation strategy” is perhaps the most controversial aspect of the war.⁴⁹ Later in the war, the Nigerians deliberated on how to limit food and supplies to the Biafran forces and were consistently obstructionist to humanitarian aid in general. Accusations abounded against Ojukwu and Biafra that they too readily used the food crisis as propaganda hoping to encourage outside intervention. The ICRC and various other organizations attempted to break the blockade by official (and impartial) means to deliver quantities of food to Biafra. By the end of 1968, an estimated 1,000 Biafran children were dying daily from malnutrition and disease.⁵⁰ The worldwide media reported the scale and depravity of the situation daily via television broadcasts and written reports. As a result, the term

⁴⁷ Olusegun Obasanjo, *My Command: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980), 48.

⁴⁸ Obasanjo, 53.

⁴⁹ Rex Niven, *The War of Nigerian Unity, 1967-1970*, (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1971, ©1970), 156.

⁵⁰ A common number reported in the mass media, International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 94, January 1969, 17

“Biafran” became synonymous with “starvation” in the public mind. Such scenes and public awareness caused considerable discomfort for many Western governments, whose leaders tried to maintain policies based on economic and security interests. The United States is a fascinating example, as it came to fund a majority of the relief effort from behind the scenes, while remaining neutral (or even pro-federal government) publicly.

The ICRC and United Nations were failing to make headway with orthodox methods. Therefore, Caritas Internationalis and the World Council of Churches consolidated an *ad hoc* effort into a massive operation surpassed in scale only by the Berlin Airlift. After the fall of Port Harcourt, the airlift offloaded at one location—Uli Airport, codenamed Annabelle, a 6500’ by 90’ stretch of converted blacktop highway that Nigerians targeted unceasingly during the war.^{51 52} Explaining *how* these organizations accomplished this amazing feat is where we will turn next.

⁵¹ Baxter, 41-42.

⁵² Baxter, 39.

Chapter 3 - Doctrine, Policy, and Guidance for Humanitarian Assistance

Large complex relief operations seldom have a unitary actor shepherding the effort. Thus, it is useful to look at a sampling of doctrine or policy statements emanating from DOD, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), and NGOs. The collective experiences in Biafra shaped many of today's practices and policies. By the end of this chapter, the reader will possess a working knowledge of terms, processes, and actors that comprise foreign humanitarian assistance.

USAID defines a complex emergency as a “disaster, usually of long term duration, that includes a combination of humanitarian, political and military dimensions which hinders the provision of external relief.”¹ The United Nations defines a complex emergency as “a humanitarian crisis in a country, region, or society where there is a total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and/or the ongoing UN country program.”² Although causes are diverse, complex emergencies are widespread in today's global security environment.³ Many of these are increasingly violent civil conflicts ranging in size from small to large.

USAID's Office of Foreign Humanitarian Assistance (OFDA) identified two common attributes of complex emergencies in its 1996

¹ USAID ADS 251: International Disaster Assistance, United States Agency for International Development, 9.

² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Fact Sheet on “Coordination in Complex Emergencies” available at <http://unhcr.org/3ba88e7c6.html>

³ Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group XVITH Meeting 30 November 1994 “Definition Of Complex Emergencies
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Foreign Humanitarian Assistance (Joint Publication 3-29)* (Washington, DC), III-3.

Strategic Plan. The first was the absence of Cold War foreign policy that required strong interventions. The second attribute was that complex emergencies lack obvious solutions.⁴ Twenty years removed, political leaders seem just as unlikely to possess the capability *or* will to resolve conflicts that stem from complex political and socioeconomic problems. Low probability of success does not mean that the United States does not seek to redress complex emergencies. It regularly, and many times rapidly, responds to crises in order to maintain regional stability. Many of these operations involve a mix of military forces and capabilities in close collaboration with other United States Government (USG) agencies, IGOs, and NGOs. The humanitarian crisis in Biafra is ripe for extracting lessons for current and future operations, but one needs a framework to evaluate the humanitarian efforts during that conflict.

It is useful to look at a sampling of doctrine or policy statements emanating from DOD, USAID, NGOs, and IGOs. In addition to Joint publications, The Sphere Project encompasses the best practices for NGOs and IGOs.⁵ Especially noteworthy are United Nations and International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) humanitarian policy and manuals.⁶ Beverly May Carl, who worked for USAID for two years on the Biafra crisis, insisted that the structure and methods of USAID during the time of the Nigerian Civil War led to struggles in procurement

⁴ USAID: Bureau for Humanitarian Response Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance "Strategic Plan" November 1996.

⁵ "The Sphere Project is a voluntary initiative that brings a wide range of humanitarian agencies together around a common aim - to improve the quality of humanitarian assistance and the accountability of humanitarian actors to their constituents, donors and affected populations. The Sphere Handbook, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, is one of the most widely known and internationally recognized sets of common principles and universal minimum standards in life-saving areas of humanitarian response. Established in 1997, the Sphere Project is not a membership organization. Governed by a Board composed of representatives of global networks of humanitarian agencies, the Sphere Project today is a vibrant community of humanitarian response practitioners." For more information visit <http://www.spherehandbook.org/en/what-is-sphere/>

⁶ The International Federation of the Red Cross Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is a body that was created in 1991 to coordinate all 185 National Societies around the world.

and politics, ultimately limiting the impact of the relief.⁷ Likewise, a 1975 audit of the Biafran relief effort concluded, “It is in the disjunction between the careful expenditure of relatively limited relief funds and the prodigious waste of vast military-industrial budgets that the political weakness of international relief organizations is most starkly apparent.”⁸

Core differences emerge between the entities that conduct humanitarian operations. Retired Army Major General William Nash and State Department Policy Planner Ciara Knudsen highlight the divergent concepts of planning between DOD and civilian agencies. They state, “The military planning process starts with an objective, is handed over to the many layers of the military planning machine adding in resources, strategy, intelligence, training, and gaming. Given the objective, the military will come up with a plan to achieve it.”⁹ The civilian planning process concentrates more on developing the objective and less on the particulars of how to get there.¹⁰ Another contrast is that bureaucratic policy and approval processes frequently hamstring DOD and the Department of State while NGOs (and IGOs to a lesser degree) can act quickly and with significant freedom. This divergence was clear in the Biafra case, epitomizing the central tension in integrating action between government and private actors in the humanitarian realm.

⁷ Kennedy, Edward M., Gidon A. G. Gottlieb, Louis Henkin, Neil Sheehan, Carl E. Taylor, and Beverly May Carl. 1972. “Biafra, Bengal, and Beyond: International Responsibility and Genocidal Conflict”. *The American Journal of International Law* 66 (4). American Society of International Law: 103-105. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25660441>.

⁸ Davis, Morris. 1975. “Audits of International Relief in the Nigerian Civil War: Some Political Perspectives”. *International Organization* 29 (2). [MIT Press, University of Wisconsin Press, Cambridge University Press, International Organization Foundation]: 501–12. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706366>.

⁹ William L. Nash and Ciara Knudsen. “Reform and Innovation in Stabilization, Reconstruction and Development”. Princeton Project on National Security, 7.

¹⁰ Nash and Knudsen, 7.

DOD and Foreign Humanitarian Assistance

Joint Publication 3-29 *Foreign Humanitarian Assistance* (FHA) is the current doctrine to which US military planners would first turn when confronted with a modern day crisis along the lines of Biafra. JP 3-29 is not the last word but incorporates enough from other joint doctrine documents, covering such matters as peace operations, civil-military operations, stability operations, and the plethora of applicable logistics, that it is certainly sufficient for the scope of this thesis. The goal in examining the document here is to provide a lens through which to study the US response to the crisis in Biafra.

JP 3-29 states that when providing humanitarian aid, the USG seeks to “save lives, alleviate suffering, and minimize the economic costs of conflict, disasters, and displacement.”¹¹ The USG also seeks to apply assistance based on need according to principles of universality, impartiality, and human dignity.¹² The DOD Directive on Foreign Disaster Relief (DoDD 5100.46) allows DOD components to provide foreign disaster relief under three circumstances. First is at the direction of the President. Next is a Secretary of Defense-approved request with concurrence of the Secretary of State in response to requests from other federal departments. The third instance is in emergencies to save human lives, where the Secretary of Defense acts and then seeks Secretary of State concurrence as soon as practical.

The NSC directs foreign assistance policies and programs among all USG departments and agencies to ensure a whole of government approach.¹³ During a crisis, an Interagency Policy Committee (IPC) will develop a far-reaching strategy for emergency response and develop tasks

¹¹ JP 3-29, I-2.

¹² JP 3-29, I-2.

¹³ JP 3-29, I-1.

for each key participant. The IPC must consider the involvement of the United Nations (UN), other responding nations, and NGOs or IGOs that may already be at work in the crisis area.¹⁴

For situations that require the employment of military capabilities, the President, with heavy reliance on the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, will normally establish a set of national strategic objectives. Accomplishment of these objectives should result in attainment of the national strategic end state—the broadly expressed conditions desired after the conclusion of an operation. Based on the strategic guidance, the commander of the corresponding Geographic Combatant Command (GCC) will determine the military end state and strategic military objectives. This process establishes the role of military forces and lays the foundation for operational design. Since FHA is often in response to an unexpected crisis, initial planning may proceed without a specific set of national or theater strategic objectives, and planners must rely on standing strategic plans.¹⁵

The US Armed Forces' Role

JP 3-29 acknowledges the influence of the “Oslo Guidelines” when employing forces to conduct FHA. Known officially as the *Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defense Assets in Disaster Relief*, the Oslo Guidelines establish a formal framework that seeks to maximize effectiveness and efficiency when using foreign military and civil defense forces in international disaster relief operations.

Despite having a UN and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) focus, the Oslo Guidelines are useful for laying out a process for requesting and integrating military forces in FHA. The Oslo Guidelines

¹⁴ JP 3-29, II-15.

¹⁵ JP 3-29, III-9.

recommend that the lead organization request foreign military assets only where there is no equivalent civilian alternative and only when the use of military assets can meet a critical humanitarian need.¹⁶ In other words, when military forces are *uniquely capable* it is acceptable to request them to fill the “humanitarian gap.” Sticking to such criteria for employing the military leads to clearer timelines and roles for military forces, aiding the transition back to civilian control and eventually the host nation.

Another area addressed by the Oslo Guidelines that is indispensable for this thesis is the categorization of FHA based on the degree of interaction with the population. Such categories help define which types of humanitarian activities might be appropriate to support with military resources under different conditions. Complex emergencies can quickly devolve into situations where ideal matches of capability to need are rare, but having a point of departure to help evaluate risk and allocate resources is helpful. The first category is direct assistance, characterized by the face-to-face distribution of goods and services.¹⁷ Next is indirect assistance, which involves such activities as transporting relief stocks and relief workers, or other activities that are at least one step removed from the population.¹⁸ Third, there is infrastructure support consisting of general services, such as road repair, airspace management, and power generation that enable relief, but are not always visible to, or directly benefit, the population.¹⁹

¹⁶ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Oslo Guidelines: Guidelines on The Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets In Disaster Relief*, Revision 1.1 November 2007, available at [https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/Oslo%20Guidelines%20ENGLISH%20\(November%202007\).pdf](https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/Oslo%20Guidelines%20ENGLISH%20(November%202007).pdf), 8.

¹⁷ Oslo Guidelines, 7.

¹⁸ Oslo Guidelines, 7.

¹⁹ Oslo Guidelines, 7.

The Oslo Guidelines insist, “The military role should focus on providing indirect assistance and infrastructure support while minimizing direct assistance.”²⁰ For the Nigerian Civil War, the approach taken is a particularly useful criterion to evaluate both the civilian effort that was the Biafran Airlift and how the USG supported that effort or acted unilaterally. Policy makers and military planners can learn significant lessons from the delicate and difficult task of intermixing with gunrunners and coaxing a belligerent into granting access to permit delivery of aid.

To avoid confusion, it is worth addressing what JP 3-29 identifies as security missions, which enable the provision of FHA. The delivery of humanitarian relief supplies often depends on the distressed country having secure serviceable ports, air terminals, roads, and railways. Often the affected country will not be able to sustain or construct these necessities and may request assistance from the USG. Relief operations will need secure areas for storage of relief material as it awaits distribution to the population. Other tasks that are more controversial, because they often risk escalation, are military activities such as routine clearance, security, armed escorts for aid convoys, protection of shelters for dislocated civilians, and security for multinational forces, NGOs, and IGOs.

DOD Operational Tasks for Evaluation

JP 3-29 breaks out capabilities in the FHA realm by component. Since the relief to Biafra was almost entirely airborne, the tasks JP 3-29 assigns to air forces provide a general list of what organizations deal with as they provide humanitarian aid. Airlift is an important method of moving relief supplies, personnel, and equipment. However, it does

²⁰ JP 3-29, III-8.

require a logistical footprint and aviation expertise to run an effective and efficient operation.

Airfields can be overwhelmed quickly with aircraft transporting relief supplies. Any air relief operation requires command and control, air traffic control, and aerial port specialists that schedule, land, load and offload aircraft in a timely matter. The capabilities of these elements become even more important when trying to conduct airlift operations under the cover of darkness or when under attack. In conflicts or austere environments, engineering and construction personnel who have the capability to repair damaged airfields rapidly also become essential.

JP 3-29 considers airfields centers of gravity for the relief effort and insists they must have a permissive localized environment to operate. This requirement is understandable if the military exercise direct control or is acting unilaterally in the theater but is harder to implement if the USG is supporting an effort indirectly. Airlift forces are certainly vulnerable (especially so on the ground) be they military or civilian. If leaders commit US forces, it is certainly worth striving for security standards recommended by Joint Publication 3-10, *Joint Security Operations in Theater*.²¹ However, large and highly visible security measures can be counterproductive. When conducting airlift operations, maintaining smaller footprints and utilizing low visibility aircraft and personnel may offer the best approach to reduce a force's vulnerability.

Outside the major functions of airlift and airfield development, air forces may also support FHA with personnel recovery, airspace control, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). These are areas where civilian agencies, IGOs, and NGOs are wholly lacking in capabilities compared to DOD. If DOD is tasked to support, its forces

²¹ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Security Operations in Theater (Joint Publication 3-10)* (Washington, DC), November 13, 2014.

can meet many needs of the forward relief area such as engineering, supply, distribution, base camp support, material handling, and water purification.²² The authority and approval to provide technical assistance are not always simple matters to square away. Thus, JP 3-29 asserts that “based upon SecDef and GCC guidance, the FHA force commander should establish operational procedures regarding technical advice and assistance to the Chief of Mission, USAID, the affected country, NGOs, and IGOs as soon as possible.”²³

The above was a brief overview of applicable doctrine. FHA is rarely neatly contained across the USG spectrum of operation or action. JP 3-29 links FHA to at least 13 different types of doctrinal operations.²⁴ For this thesis’s purposes, Biafra falls best under FHA because there was no effort to provide active protection or security for the operation. Moreover, neutrality was an imperative for all groups conducting relief operations.

USAID and FHA

USAID provides humanitarian assistance and coordinates the USG response to declared disasters in foreign countries. The Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), under the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA), acts as the lead USG organization for the management and coordination of the USG international disaster response. USAID published a *Policy on Cooperation with the Department of Defense* that defines how USAID cooperates with DOD through communication, coordination, and

²² JP 3-29, III 13-14.

²³ JP 3-29, III 13-14.

²⁴ JP 3-29 lists: Foreign Disaster Relief (FDR) / Dislocated Civilian Support / Security Missions / Technical Assistance / Stability Operations / Nation assistance (NA) / Humanitarian and Civic Assistance (HCA). / Security Assistance / Foreign Internal Defense (FID) / Peace Operations (PO) / Noncombatant evacuation operations (NEO) / Mass Atrocity Response Operations (MARO) / Foreign Consequence Management (FCM)

collaboration. In essence, the policy “reflects a new way of doing business – one grounded in harnessing innovation, local leadership, and public-private partnerships to deliver real results. As part of that effort, we are embracing creative development solutions that we can implement alongside our military partners.”²⁵ In facing a crisis like Syria, USAID deployed such an approach to “focus on how we can collaborate with the military to save lives faster than ever before.”²⁶

These focus areas extend not to just DOD but to the reality of providing aid during complex emergencies. USAID utilizes various organizations to execute its mandate. These organizations include the Office of Food for Peace (FFP). OFDA and FFP often jointly support projects, with OFDA bestowing supplemental funding for administration of emergency food efforts. In responding to disasters and in building preparedness, OFDA works closely with regional bureaus and other USAID missions. A regional example relevant to our case study is how OFDA has worked very closely with the Africa Bureau (AFR), particularly with AFR’s Disaster Response Office, to coordinate assistance to many emergencies in Africa. In responding to complex emergencies, OFDA’s relationship with the State Department is essential. Often the US Ambassador is the focal point for synchronizing U.S. emergency assistance. OFDA works closely with the State Department’s regional bureaus and the Population, Refugee and Migration Bureau (PRM) in Washington. These capabilities complement the DOD, which has seen an increased role in disaster assistance. Historically DOD has been the “go-to” organization for transportation, but with the shift to more violent complex emergencies, it has seen growth and demand in other areas.

²⁵ USAID Policy On Cooperation with the Department of Defense, June 2015.

<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAIDPolicyCooperationDoD.pdf>

²⁶ USAID Policy On Cooperation with the Department of Defense, vii.

OFDA must also work with and through host governments. Often OFDA seeks to build effective partnerships with host governments before a disaster through preparedness programs. OFDA's strategy highlights that "because complex emergencies are frequently characterized by political instability and governmental breakdown, OFDA tends to work predominantly through NGOs and international organizations in these situations."²⁷ Private voluntary organizations (PVOs) augment NGOs and IGOs and receive over 50% of OFDA's funding.²⁸ The United Nations' operational agencies and international organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross are also key OFDA partners in emergency response.²⁹ OFDA supports the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Program (WFP), and even foreign country aid offices. OFDA has also strengthened ties and expanded partnerships with the European Union's Emergency Office (ECHO). This preponderance of collaboration assures "burden sharing" with all partners in the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

USAID Operational Tasks for Evaluation

OFDA seeks to achieve two clear strategic objectives. First, OFDA tries to mitigate disasters upstream by implementing measures that strengthen infrastructure and economies in countries prone to man-made disasters. OFDA's second strategic objective is meeting the critical needs of targeted vulnerable groups in declared disaster situations. OFDA forms a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to address those critical needs. During the initial onset of disasters, the DART focuses on coordinating needs assessments, recommending the USG response, managing on-site relief activities (especially air operations),

²⁷ USAID-OFDA Strategic Plan, 5.

²⁸ USAID-OFDA Strategic Plan, 5.

²⁹ USAID-OFDA Strategic Plan, 5

and managing logistic operations for USG relief supplies while liaising with NGOs and IGOs.

Although the USAID Strategy lays out intermediate results and indicators for attaining its second strategic objective, the USAID/OFDA *Field Operations Guide for Disaster Assessment and Response* is more useful in evaluating relief operations to Biafra.³⁰ In the realm of Logistics, the OFDA establishes a Logistics Coordinator, who supports the DART. Under the Logistics Coordinator are the Supply Officer, Transportation Officer, and the Aviation Officer.³¹ It is striking how useful of a breakout into roles and lines of effort the field operations guide provides under these positions. Each of the four positions has recommended tasks broken down into pre-departure, in-country immediate, in country on-going, and demobilization phases.³²

NGOs / IGOs and Foreign Humanitarian Assistance

JP 3-29 indicates the importance of working with NGOs that follow the UN principles of humanitarian relief and international standards such as the *Code of Conduct of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in Disaster Relief*. Disaster shaken societies have a right to expect those assisting them to meet these standards.³³ As mentioned previously, the Sphere Project represents the current NGO perspective based on two core beliefs. First, those affected by disaster or conflict have a right to life with dignity and, therefore, a right to assistance. Second is to take all possible steps to alleviate human suffering arising out of disaster or conflict.³⁴ These core beliefs become strategic objectives when applied to a particular geographical disaster or

³⁰ USAID-OFDA Field Operations Guide for Disaster Assessment and Response, Version 4.0.

³¹ USAID-OFDA Field Operations Guide, IV-41.

³² USAID-OFDA Field Operations Guide, IV-41.

³³ JP 3-29, II-14.

³⁴ Sphere Handbook, 4.

complex emergency. The Sphere Project framed a humanitarian charter that set out minimum standards in key life-saving sectors. The sectors are as follows: water supply, sanitation, and hygiene promotion; food security and nutrition; shelter, settlement and non-food items; and health action.³⁵ For each of the sectors the Sphere Project develops and applies what they term as “Core Standards.”

The six Core Standards are as follows: People-centered humanitarian response, coordination-collaboration, assessment, design-response, performance, transparency and learning, aid worker performance.³⁶ Each Core Standard is qualitative in nature and sets out a level of achievement. Key actions are suggested activities and inputs to help meet the standards while key indicators are signals that confirm the attainment of a standard. The Sphere Handbook’s guidance notes address practical difficulties and may highlight critical issues relating to the standards that may lead to dilemmas or increased risk. Thus by providing key actions, indicators, and guidance notes, the Sphere handbook provides a transition to operational objectives.

NGO Operational Tasks for Evaluation

In the sector of food security, one can grasp how the Sphere approach can shed light on the Biafran Airlift. Standard #4 in this sector is Supply Chain Management (SCM). The Standard is “commodities and associated costs are well managed using impartial, transparent and responsive systems.” There are seven key actions and four key indicators in this section along with thirteen guidance notes. The Sphere Handbook describes supply chain management as “an integrated approach to logistics. Starting with the choice of commodity, it includes sourcing, procurement, quality assurance, packaging, shipping,

³⁵ Sphere Handbook, 4.

³⁶ Sphere Handbook, 2

transportation, warehousing, inventory management and insurance.”³⁷ For DOD planners, the focus of management and monitoring practices is safeguarding commodities to distribution nodes. For successful integration, however, military personnel should assist or at least seek to understand how humanitarian agencies are ensuring the food is reaching the targeted population.³⁸ A case in point would be the 400 plus distribution centers Caritas and the ICRC were administering in Biafra by January 1969.³⁹

IGO Operational Tasks for Evaluation

The United Nations did not act in Biafra, but it has emerged as the mechanism for organization and legitimacy when countries want to act on humanitarian grounds. Although they rely on powerful members for funding and authority, IGOs can have great impact during complex emergencies. It is useful to glean operational imperatives and methods from current United Nations and ICRC policy to understand how inaction influenced events in Nigeria.

United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) is a “stand-by team of disaster management professionals who are nominated and funded by member governments, [United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs] UNOCHA, [United Nations Development Program] UNDP, and operational humanitarian UN agencies such as WFP, UNICEF, and World Health Organization (WHO).”⁴⁰ Upon request of an affected country, the UNDAC team can rapidly deploy to carry out assessments of critical needs and support national authorities and UN entities coordinating relief on-site. The

³⁷ Sphere Handbook, 189.

³⁸ Sphere Handbook, 189.

³⁹ International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 94, January 1969, 18.

⁴⁰ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) Field Handbook, 6th Edition, 2013.

UNDAC team establishes and runs an On Site Operations and Coordination Center (OSOCC). The OSOCC is a scalable unit that has three main objectives. First is to provide a system for coordinating and directing the activities of an international relief effort at the site of an emergency. Second is to provide a framework or platform for cooperation and coordination among the international humanitarian entities at a disaster site. The third and final role is to act as a link between relief organizations and the affected country's authorities.

UNDACs five-step cycle of humanitarian assistance is similar to DOD's, consisting of the needs assessment and analysis, strategic response planning, resource mobilization, implementation and monitoring, and operational review and evaluation. UN guidance stresses that such an approach leads to a better focus on the needs of the affected people, particularly the most vulnerable.⁴¹ The UNDAC cycle also aids in fund procurement and accountability for actors and donors, which should translate into greater effectiveness. Thus, UN policy has evolved to represent disaster logistics as a systems exercise requiring several operational tasks and capabilities. Example tasks include the following: the delivery of the appropriate supplies in good condition, a wide range of transport, contingency deliveries from outside the area, prioritizing relief inputs, storing, staging and moving bulk commodities, moving people, allocation process for limited assets, and integration of military involvement the logistics chain. The UNDAC Handbook lays out four main factors that largely shape a humanitarian relief effort. They are the capacity of the infrastructure, availability and quantity of transport assets in the country, politics of the situation, and civil conflict in the area of operations.⁴²

⁴¹ UNDAC Field Handbook, 13.

⁴² UNDAC Field Handbook, Annex G- 3.

The UNDAC Handbook puts emphasis on getting the structure of a relief logistics operation laid out as early as possible. The handbook identifies the components of the supply chain as points of origin, port of entry, primary warehouse, and forward warehouses, and terminal storage points that tie directly to distribution nodes. A structure with these components causes functions to emerge during the transition to execution. A short list of functions includes management, central support, procurement, port clearance warehouse/storage, transport, scheduling, communications, commodity control, and distribution control.

Methodology Summary

As part of the deeper investigation of events of the Biafran Airlift in the following two chapters, this thesis will first focus on the airlift and the NGOs that conducted the operations (Chapter Four). Next, will be the USG response to the crisis (Chapter Five). The UNDAC shaping factors of capacity of infrastructure, availability and quantity of transport, politics of the situation and civil conflict in the area of operations will be the overarching categories of discussion for Chapter Four. Chapter Five will use JP 3-29's guidance to evaluate the USG effort according to interagency coordination, the process of requesting aid, type of approach (direct vs. indirect), the operating environment and politics of the situation. The prevalence of the importance of coordination, collaboration, and communication throughout this doctrine review speaks to their criticality. The concept of integration is the best way to begin link the following two chapters and bridge them to the implications of this study. Packaging how the United States integrates humanitarian airlift into its foreign policy is realistic only if conducting aid operations in complex emergencies is feasible and acceptable. If this becomes a reality, it can become a positive part of our country's narrative

to our friends and perhaps more importantly to our enemies abroad where we act in our national interests.



Chapter Four - The Airlift

If viewed in relation to the scale of the need in Biafra, the Biafran Airlift was overwhelmed from day one. As early as September 1967, NGOs warned of the imminent danger of mass starvation and suffering in the east.¹ Officials in the Federal Nigerian Government and military declared that blockade and starvation were acceptable tools of warfare, and effective and devastating tools they were.² As the Federal military campaign encircled Biafra with the capture of Enugu (4 October 67) and Calabar (18 October 67), Port Harcourt became the sole remaining source of entry for food and medicine to Biafra.³

The ICRC received permission to fly relief supplies into Port Harcourt for about a month starting on 20 December 1967, but Gowon rescinded all prior agreements in mid-January. The justification was that arms smugglers were using the relief windows to resupply the Biafran military forces.⁴ The denial by Gowon would be the first of many fits and starts for the ICRC, which, despite massive amounts of funding and experience, would fly about one-fifth of the amount of relief supplies into Biafra during the war.⁵ It is noteworthy that *before* Port Harcourt fell to Federal forces, the suffering in Biafra was apparent on such a scale that the ICRC, Caritas, and the World Council of Churches (WCC) were all independently moving to take action.

By the end of January 1968, the Pope authorized Caritas to establish a relief program for both sides in the conflict. Caritas appointed Father Anthony Byrne as the head of its relief operation to

¹ International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 78, September 1967, 468.

² International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 86, May 1968, 250.

³ Niven, 126.

⁴ Draper, 134.

⁵ It's worth noting here that the ICRC delivered a significant amount of aid (including airlifts) to the areas retaken and occupied by the Federal Military Government of Nigeria (FMG) in Eastern Nigeria. They also fulfilled their traditional wartime tasks of medical assistance and prisoner of war monitoring to the utmost.

Biafra. Father Byrne would take on a significant leadership role in the execution of the JCA airlift from São Tomé. He negotiated contracts with Hank Wharton, an infamous arms dealer and smuggler, to fly the initial Caritas relief supplies into Biafra.⁶ Father Byrne enlisted the Governor of São Tomé to threaten to shut down Wharton if he neglected relief flights for arms flights. The first Caritas supplies landed at Port Harcourt on 26 March 1968 via Wharton's aircraft. WCC also contracted lift through Wharton with their first flight on 22 March 1968.⁷ Wharton would be the primary facilitator for Caritas, the ICRC, and the WCC in the early days of the airlift.⁸ This facilitation ranged from actual movement of supplies to administrative tasks such as purchasing and registering aircraft for the organizations as the effort grew.

Wharton was the conduit for access to Biafra because he held the trust of Ojukwu and the Biafran military early in the conflict (this would not last). As a result, Wharton maintained a monopoly on the landing codes for the airfields both at Harcourt and later at Uli.⁹ Biafran policy would restrict the airlift in two ways, first by restricting flights to nighttime operations and second by refusing any collaboration with Lagos on relief for fear of poisoned food.¹⁰ The former proved a prudent caution as the Nigerian Air Force regularly strafed and bombed uncamouflaged aircraft stranded at Uli. They would later shoot down relief aircraft during daylight operations. The latter constraint was probably more of a political move. Ojukwu risked illegitimacy if it appeared he was relying on the Federal government for aid, even if it was the Red Cross actually providing it. The better access into Biafra for the

⁶ Niven, 151.

⁷ Draper, 115.

⁸ de St. Jorre, 238.

⁹ de St. Jorre, 322.

¹⁰ Foreign Relations Of The United States, 1969–1976, Volume E–5, PART 1, Documents On Sub-Sahara Africa, 1969–1972 25. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, Washington, January 28, 1969

churches stemmed from this early association with Wharton and associated basing out of São Tomé.

The mere fact that the ICRC attempted to work with the Federal Government of Nigeria to maintain neutrality and legitimacy made for a rough relationship with Ojukwu. Lagos maintained its stern “fly at your own risk policy” after effectively obstructing flights from Lagos into Biafra. Like Caritas, the ICRC used Wharton to contract relief flights from the island of Fernando Póo while trying to build its fleet and operational capability. However, the utilization of Fernando Poo as an operating base immediately caused problems for the ICRC. Given they were Spanish subjects, the authorities at Fernando Póo were sympathetic to the Nigerian Federal Government.¹¹ Many Nigerians lived on the island, and it was the location of a large and active Nigerian Embassy. The controllers at Saint Isabel Airport would not allow night operations, so Hank Wharton’s L-1049G Constellations had to reposition to São Tomé before flying to Biafra under the cover of darkness. Wharton fulfilled the first contract for five flights to the ICRC but struggled with additional flights as Port Harcourt fell to the Nigerians and his fleet took losses.

A WCC relief flight was the first to land at the Uli airstrip on 21 May establishing the improvised runway as a viable replacement for Port Harcourt.¹² The first casualties of the Biafran Airlift came on 1 July 1968 when one of Wharton’s L-1049Gs piloted by “Augie” Martin, the first ever African-American pilot at a major US airline, crashed at Uli airport while trying to land in a rainstorm loaded with ICRC relief supplies. All three crew and Martin’s wife who was on board died in the crash. This accident exposed the ICRC’s (and the other organizations’)

¹¹ Obasanjo, 165.

¹² Draper, 116

reliance on Wharton and the issues that relationship produced. Two separate issues were at hand. The first issue was the legitimacy of the relief effort since it was intermixed (though not via actual mixed loads) with the war material logistics. The second issue was that Wharton's operation did not have the capacity to support the relief effort. Caritas Secretary General Monsignor Carlo Bayer arranged for Father Byrne to make a television appearance in Germany to appeal for aid.¹³ Following Byrne's appearance, the German Government allocated eight million Deutschmarks to the German Catholic and German Protestant relief agencies (Deutscher Caritasverband (DCV) and Das Diakonische Werke [DDW]) to support the relief effort.¹⁴

By July, the WCC and Caritas held meetings on initiating a dedicated relief airlift. The Churches made overtures towards the ICRC for a coordinated effort, but the latter said no.¹⁵ From there the churches took unilateral action and set out to build their fleet starting with five surplus DC-7 aircraft acquired through the DCV and DDW funds. For these aircraft, the churches used Wharton to register the planes and relied on his pilots to fly the sorties. The ICRC continued contracts with Wharton that allowed him to buy Italian C-46s with the ICRC cash to increase his fleet size.¹⁶ Despite the addition of the C-46s, there was not enough lift to transport the ever-increasing loads of aid heading to Biafra. Ultimately, the Church organizations and the Red Cross perceived Wharton as favoring the more lucrative business of supplying military material and they sought to break ties with him.

In July 1968, Geneva appointed the Swiss Ambassador to Moscow, Dr. Auguste Lindt, as its relief coordinator for Nigeria.¹⁷ The ICRC's

¹³ Tony Byrne, *Airlift to Biafra: Breaching the Blockade*, (Dublin, Ireland: Columba Press, 1997), 83.

¹⁴ Byrne, 88.

¹⁵ Draper, 118.

¹⁶ Draper, 118-120.

¹⁷ International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 89, August 1968, 398.

difficult effort in Biafra certainly benefited from his energy and determination. Lindt's appointment coincided with a set of peace talks initiated by the OAU first at Niamey then at Addis Ababa during the month of July.¹⁸ Leaving Niamey, a formula appeared for not only peace but also a way to supply relief aid into Biafra in the interim. Lindt was actively seeking diplomatic concessions from both sides to allow for a joint land corridor for bulk supplies and a daytime airlift from Fernando Póo.¹⁹ Neither the OAU nor the ICRC would see peace or cooperation on relief materialize from the talks in July.²⁰ Lindt did make progress in other critical areas. He convinced the Spanish authorities to acknowledge the airlift to Biafra and allow nighttime flights from Fernando Póo. The relief groups' persistence with Ojukwu led to a Biafran Delegate passing the Uli landing codes to the Canadian Reverend E.H. Johnson at an ICRC conference.²¹ Gaining the codes established a new norm for relief flights separate from Wharton's control, thus enabling the next phase of the Biafran Airlift.²²

With newfound freedom to operate, Lindt again conversed with the Gowon and the Nigerians. The Federal Military Government of Nigeria (FMG) insisted the ICRC would be operating at its own risk, yet Lindt received a reluctant assurance that the Nigerians would not interfere.²³ As the conflict dragged on it appears the FMG's memory lapsed on this unofficial stance. The ICRC would move quickly to start independent flights through a contract with Swiss airline Balair.²⁴ Flights on Balair

¹⁸ International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 88, July 1968, 356.

¹⁹ International Review of the Red Cross, Aug 1968, 399.

²⁰ International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 91, October 1968, 516

²¹ Peter Bush, "Biafra and the Canadian Churches, 1966-1970", *Historical Papers 2003: Canadian Society of Church History*, available at

<http://historicalpapers.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/historicalpapers/article/view/39291/35623>

²² Bush, 138

²³ International Review of the Red Cross, Oct 1968, 561.

²⁴ International Review of the Red Cross, Oct 1968, 561.

DC-6Bs landed as early as 31 July 1968.²⁵ On 6 August 1968, one of the Church DC-7Cs suffered damage during a landing at Uli. Workers at the field camouflaged the aircraft and maintainers conducted repairs over the course of ten days thanks to parts and spares flown in on other aircraft bringing supplies. The DC-7C would depart safely on 17 August.²⁶

By the night of 9 August, the ICRC decided to increase to two flights per night, and the Church DC-7s were humming along at an increasing pace. However, that same night ICRC and church flights would take air defense (flak) and artillery fire that appeared to be radar guided. Although the ICRC flight continued unharmed, the church planes returned to São Tomé.²⁷ Both Wharton's pilots and ICRC pilots refused to fly in light of the latest escalation by the Nigerians. This phase of uncertainty coincided with a particularly bleak military situation for Biafra. The ICRC decided to wait out a Biafran collapse many thought imminent by the end of September to prepare for a large post-conflict relief and reconstruction effort.²⁸ Leaders in Lagos played up this propaganda window declaring that the church groups were providing food to the Biafran military and that any such groups would be ineligible to participate in any post war relief efforts.²⁹

During this time, Oxfam and the British Red Cross attempted to lease a C-130 Hercules, but they tied utilization of the aircraft to joint Nigerian-Biafran approval of daytime flights, which would never take place. Lindt continued to do what he did best, circulating throughout Africa and Europe to negotiate a peace and allowance for relief. One noteworthy aspect of Lindt's role in the Biafran Airlift was his access to a

²⁵ International Review of the Red Cross, Aug 1968, 400.

²⁶ Draper, 120.

²⁷ Draper, 124.

²⁸ de St Jorre, 245.

²⁹ de St Jorre, 403, 406.

personal aircraft, a Mitsubishi Mu-2B.³⁰ Lindt had freedom of movement throughout a theater of operations that reached back to donors and headquarters in the West, Lagos, and the warzone in Biafra.³¹ Military commanders call this movement “battlefield circulation” and realize the critical need of assessing firsthand the operational environment and one’s forces while maintaining the ability to conduct key leader engagements.

Meanwhile, a new character entered the church camp two days after the flak incident: Count Gustav von Rosen. A Swedish count who was the black sheep son of royalty, a nephew of Hermann Göring by marriage, and a veteran of combat and relief operations in Abyssinia, Poland, Finland, and the Congo, he arrived from Europe with relief supplies to find all operations at São Tomé stood down.³² Father Byrne greeted von Rosen on arrival and briefed him on the situation in Biafra. Father Byrne asked the Count to fly his cargo directly into Biafra. At first, von Rosen refused for all the right reasons (insurance for the crew and aircraft...his role was just to ferry for Transair Sweden) but after further pleas relented and said he would see what he could do.³³

On the evening of 12 August, von Rosen led a crew into Uli and then remained to meet Ojukwu. Von Rosen’s flight effectively broke the blockade and reinvigorated the relief effort.³⁴ The meeting with Ojukwu foreshadowed von Rosen’s significant role in air power over Biafra. He later supplied and led the Biafran Air Force, but first he was the operations chief for Nordchurchaid. Nordchurchaid was the consolidation of effort by the churches under von Rosen. Nordchurchaid

³⁰ International Review of the Red Cross, Aug 1968, 398

³¹ International Review of the Red Cross, Aug 1968, 398.

³² Byrne, 123.

³³ Byrne, 124.

³⁴ Byrne, 125.

existed as an *ad hoc* transport organization independent of Hank Wharton, with its own chartered fleet.

It appears that von Rosen may have convinced Ojukwu to ditch Wharton completely as Biafra started receiving arms airlifts from Lisbon coordinated at meetings in São Tomé in mid-August.³⁵ Von Rosen proposed that the Scandinavian companies provide the fleet in the form of seven aircraft plus one spare flying two sorties nightly. Within days, Nordchurchaid identified three DC-7Bs from Transair Sweden AB, a DC-6B from Sterling Airways, and two C-46Rs from Fred Olsen Air Transport as the initial fleet. Von Rosen again reached out to the Red Cross to join forces, but Lindt denied the offer.³⁶

Lindt and the Red Cross were not idle either. After a rival relief group called Mercy Missions attempted to operate out of Fernando Póo, the ICRC launched back into action. The ICRC began gearing up for what would be its most productive phase of contribution to the Biafran Airlift.³⁷ By the beginning of September 1968, the ICRC successfully gained permission from the Biafrans to administer Obilagu airstrip in Central Biafra.³⁸ The Red Cross paid for and oversaw improvements to the strip, allowing the organization to separate its effort from the arms supplies in an attempt to maintain neutrality and legitimacy, which was worth the cost.³⁹

September was also a bleak time for Biafra. Federal offensives compelled the Biafran forces to abandon Uli for four nights.⁴⁰ After the first ICRC flights to Obilagu on 4 September 1968, the airfield fell to Nigerian Forces on 23 September. Chaos ensued when Biafrans,

³⁵ de St. Jorre, 322.

³⁶ Draper, 143.

³⁷ Draper, 129.

³⁸ International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 90, September 1968, 460.

³⁹ International Review of the Red Cross, Sep 1968, 462.

⁴⁰ International Review of the Red Cross, Oct 1968, 518.

desperate for military supplies, began rerouting arms flights to Obilagu. Once Uli reopened ICRC and Nordchurchaid aircraft did not know which airfield they would be going to until directed by Biafran controllers.

Lindt traveled into Biafra, confronting Ojukwu over the issue of arms flights landing at Obilagu, but the meeting proved counterproductive. On 19 September, a Biafran military officer at the airstrip told the crew of an ICRC C-130 that landed at Obilagu the field was now for the exclusive use of the Biafran Government and to reroute all relief flights to the now reopened Uli.⁴¹ Of the month that Obilagu was operational, the Red Cross was only able to access it exclusively for seven days. The conditions of the war and the geographic challenges of supporting and enclave frustrated the ICRC efforts at Obilagu more than any actual missteps on their part. Obilagu is noteworthy because it was the first neutral relief airfield in the history of the ICRC operations.

Despite the Federal offensives inducing chaos, Nordchurchaid flights flew alongside the German church flights and the ICRC initiated Operation International Airlift West Africa (INAWLA).⁴² The increased density and pace of operations led to an increased risk of mishaps and miscalculation. The perils of the new pace manifested into disaster on 3 October 1968 when a French Red Cross (Separate from ICRC and operating from Libreville) DC-6B struck a disabled German Church DC-7C on the deck at Uli.⁴³ The DC-7 had suffered a locked brake, and the Biafran air traffic controller was unable to communicate with the French pilot who landed normally without proper clearance. Maintainers flown in on the next night declared the DC-7 worthy of only being a spare parts aircraft, and it was moved off the runway and camouflaged. Eventually,

⁴¹ Draper, 145.

⁴² International Review of the Red Cross, Oct 1968, 518.

⁴³ Draper, 150.

the discipline of the Biafrans to conceal it wore off and Nigerian MiG-17Fs destroyed it with strafing attacks.⁴⁴

The ICRC accepted a chartered Canadian Air Force C-130 in October to complement the Swedish Red Cross C-130 already in operation. Unfortunately, these highly capable (designed for austere fields and carrying 18 tons) aircraft did not remain long. The Swiss Hercules returned to Europe for maintenance while the Canadian Air Force recalled their C-130 to Canada once the Nigerian Air Force C-47 converted into a bomber commenced night attacks on 26 October.⁴⁵ The C-47, whose callsign “Intruder” became its moniker, never shut down Uli for more than a night but did destroy several aircraft and kill dozens of Biafrans and several aircrew. Aircrews often described the unceasing presence of the bomber as a nuisance, but it did frustrate operations significantly.⁴⁶ In fact, the new lighting procedures (the Biafran controllers turning them on at the last possible minute to deny the C-47 a well-lit target) would contribute to later fatal mishaps at the airfield. The first fatal attack came on the night of 5 November 1968 and killed twelve Biafran airfield workers with the aircrew also suffering significant injuries. Pilots flew the DC-7 home that same night on only two engines due to the bomb damage.⁴⁷ The “Intruder” would have four more successful “hits,” and its menacing presence would last till the very end of the war.⁴⁸

Shortly after the near-miss on 5 November, the Church relief organizations suffered their first fatal accident. A DC-7C piloted by John McOmie crashed after hitting some trees south of the runway. The crash

⁴⁴ Draper, 150.

⁴⁵ International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 93, December 1968, 632

⁴⁶ Byrne 142-144

⁴⁷ Draper, 137.

⁴⁸ de St. Jorre, 318.

killed all four crewmembers instantly.⁴⁹ Although the investigation attributed the crash to human error, the cloud deck and weather were particularly bad that night, and that particular aircraft had a history of inaccurate instruments.⁵⁰ Torrential rainstorms, bombing attacks, poor lighting and approach systems, and bad communications made landing on what was already a makeshift airstrip extremely hazardous. These conditions improved a bit as a byproduct of the US's support to the airlift. By mid-March, 1969 USA Flight Test, the charter company for the C-97Gs, installed and operations checked a visual approach path indicator (VAPI) and a non-directional navigational beacon (NDB) at Uli.⁵¹

Despite the now regular day and night attacks by MiG-17s and the “Intruder,” in many ways the Biafran Airlift was hitting its stride. During Operation INAWLA, the ICRC would fly over 1,100 missions from September 1968 to June 1969. The battle on the ground was indecisive with few major changes to the fronts as 1969 approached. The gradual tightening of the noose around Biafra only made the humanitarian situation worse. Consequently, international awareness of the conflict and its associated siege skyrocketed. In two days of meetings arranged by Caritas in Rome in the fall of 1968, aid groups first used the title Joint Church Aid.⁵² The meeting, likely a reflection of both the dire situation in Biafra and the resources flowing into the aid groups, followed the increased awareness and outrage. Nordchurchaid, the German Church organizations, and Caritas agreed to work together to find ways to increase the capacity of the airlift. JCA was the chosen name for a proposed jointly financed plan to charter a C-130, seen as the ideal platform for the airlift but beyond the means of the groups unless they

⁴⁹ Byrne, 148.

⁵⁰ Pat Neylon, Official Report: Accident Of VL-BCY - DC-7C SER. 45545 at Uli Airport Biafra On December 8th, at Approximately 00:55 HR Biafra Time, available at <http://www.patneylon.com/index.php/biafra/official-report>

⁵¹ Draper, 137.

⁵² Byrne, 90.

combined their monies.⁵³ The C-130 plan did not work out, but JCA would soon inherit C-97G Stratofreighters from the United States. Although Chapter Five will cover United States involvement in the relief effort, it is worth noting some key events. In 1969, President Nixon took office and Senators Eugene McCarthy and Ted Kennedy intensified their calls for action. The White House directed the Department of State to stand up a task force on Biafra. By far the largest fruit of Kennedy's campaigning for action on Biafra was announcement on 28 December 1968 that the US was making eight National Guard C-97Gs available to the relief effort. The US divided the Stratofreighters, four each to the ICRC and JCA.

In late January, another relief organization arrived at São Tomé. The Canadian Presbyterian Church and Oxfam Canada formed CANAIRELIEF in November 1968.⁵⁴ Creating a company under the same name to purchase and operate aircraft, CANAIRELIEF joined JCA with three L-1049 Super Constellations (known affectionately by its crews as "Connie").⁵⁵ The four C-97s and three Connies were a massive increase in capacity for the JCA. JCA faced challenges with costs and pilot shortages as the tonnages increased. Aid supplied to the effort was arriving at São Tomé in unprecedented levels from groups like Africa Concern.⁵⁶ In May of 1969, JCA made one more final adjustment to its operation. To lower costs and avoid overregulation of pilot flying hours JCA formed Flughjalp (Aid by Air in English) and registered it in Iceland. Flughjalp consolidated all of Transavia DC-6Bs.⁵⁷ The combination of the DC-6Bs, American Stratofreighters, and CANAIRELIEF Constellations would be the main JCA fleet until the end of the war. Despite multiple

⁵³ Draper 157

⁵⁴ Bush, 138.

⁵⁵ Bush, 138.

⁵⁶ Concern, "Our History" Fact Sheet, available at <https://www.concern.net/about/history>

⁵⁷ Draper, 169.

crashes, mishaps, and deadly attacks, JCA would fly almost 3,000 sorties from April 1969 to early January when the FMG overran Uli and Biafra surrendered.⁵⁸

One event worth mentioning that affected the JCA effort is the fuel depot explosion at São Tomé on 27 April 1969. Attributed to Nigerian sabotage, it was a huge blow to the fragile logistical operation of JCA.⁵⁹ Father Byrne was able to convince the São Tomé authorities to authorize JCA to utilize military stocks of fuel until JCA could rebuild the facilities and extra deliveries of fuel brought to the island. The São Tomé relief organizations would face another fuel shortage in December after the tacit blockade by Nigeria forced tankers to arrive late. At least one of the offloads was contaminated fuel.⁶⁰ Although expeditionary logistics in a war zone are certainly difficult, it seems that JCA never put enough thought into a base of operations built on a durable and enduring supply chain. Undoubtedly, the feeling that Biafra was always on the verge of collapse cemented the perception of it as a crisis for most involved and prevented long term planning necessary for a robust logistical network

For the ICRC November began ominously when a Nigerian Mig-17F strafed a Balair C-160D Transall landing at Uli. Many of the ICRC pilots refused to fly for several weeks until they received assurances of their immunity from attack. The attack at Uli further damaged the relationship between Biafra and the ICRC. Ojukwu often accused the Red Cross of leading the Nigerian Air Force to Uli through their efforts to maintain transparency and neutrality.⁶¹ The Nigerians exerted pressure in other ways. The ICRC had trouble just getting airborne on a regular basis due to continued interference from the officials at Fernando Póo.⁶²

⁵⁸ Draper, 277.

⁵⁹ Draper, 170.

⁶⁰ Draper, 170.

⁶¹ Ojukwu, 81-85.

⁶² International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 94, January 1969, 7.

Paired with the challenges at the time from the seasonal weather patterns, Lindt began earnestly seeking other basing options. The ICRC identified Cotonou, Dahomey (now known as Benin) as the best option and began negotiations. Despite Nigerian diplomatic pressure and closing its border with Dahomey, the ICRC received permission at the end of January 1969 to base seven aircraft in Cotonou to fly relief aid into Biafra.⁶³

By the end of March, the Red Cross would have the four US C-97Gs at its disposal to operate from Cotonou.⁶⁴ Lindt did not abandon Fernando Póo completely and flew as many missions as possible from there.⁶⁵ In particular, during a period of uprisings and protests on the island, the ICRC flew supplies to exiled officials in return for more operating leeway. The ICRC would fly over 860 sorties and deliver nearly 10,000 tons from Cotonou, but tragedy loomed in the summer of 1969.

There were many minor incidents prior to 6 May, but in the dangerous environment at Uli, those forward in Fernando Póo and Biafra possessed a higher tolerance of risk reporting even significant mishaps back to Geneva only as “technical snags.”⁶⁶ On the night of 6 May, the ICRC had its first major accident in the nine months since INAWLA began.⁶⁷ After calling for the activation of the runway lights, a Balair DC-6AC crashed short of the runway after striking trees, eventually bursting into flames at its final impact point.⁶⁸ A sister DC-6 was overhead and saw the explosion. An experienced crew flew the aircraft under clear conditions. The accident investigation summed up the life and death experience of operating at Uli by simply stating the crash

⁶³ International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 95, February 1969, 86.

⁶⁴ International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 95, April 1969, 181

⁶⁵ International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 94, March 1969, 169.

⁶⁶ Draper 172

⁶⁷ International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 97, June 1969, 311

⁶⁸ Draper 172

occurred because of “the very difficult conditions for a direct approach to an unlit runway.”⁶⁹

The following night a JCA C-97G crashed landed on the runway at Uli and shut it down for the remainder of the night. The damage was extensive, and removing the aircraft exceeded the capability of the ground crews and equipment at Uli. However, in one of the many ironies of the Biafran airlift, the next morning right on schedule the Nigerian MiG-17s showed up to look for stragglers and strafed the Stratofreighter to pieces and caused it to burst into flames. The attacks made removing the aircraft in pieces a realistic task and Uli reopened the next night. On 2 June 1969, the Nigerians displayed a tactical escalation of force, but the relief organizations missed the message. Two Nigerian MiG-17Fs flying at night over Uli strafed and bombed a JCA DC-6 while it was trying to land. The DC-6 crash landed at Uli but was later flown out after extensive and risky field repairs. Once back at São Tomé maintainers scrapped the aircraft due to the amount of structural damage.⁷⁰

On the night of 5 June, an ICRC DC-7B flown by American Captain David Brown would meet a darker fate.⁷¹ Two MiG-17Fs intercepted the aircraft as it was approaching the coast having departed Fernando Póo. The Nigerian fighters twice ordered the aircraft to land at Port Harcourt. When the DC-7 continued to Uli, one of the MiG-17s fired several cannon bursts across the wings of the aircraft.⁷² Captain Brown’s plane sustained damage and after making radio calls indicating he was under attack and that his engine was on fire, the plane crashed near Eket with all on board perishing.⁷³ The downed aircraft had

⁶⁹ Draper, 172.

⁷⁰ Draper, 174.

⁷¹ International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 97, July 1969, 353.

⁷² Draper, 178.

⁷³ Draper 178

departed earlier than normal and instead of reaching the coast right after dark, it was silhouetted against a clear and still bright sky.⁷⁴

Clearly, the Nigerians had raised the stakes. One possible justification was retaliation for successful attacks by von Rosen's light attack aircraft on Nigerian air bases.⁷⁵ Also, since the majority of the MiG pilots were mercenaries they considered the relief pilots the same.⁷⁶ There was a rumored sentiment that the airlift pilots were getting greedy by leaving earlier and earlier to get in an extra bonus flight each night. The Nigerians had also recently made some leadership changes in the Army and Air Force, and they were demanding results.⁷⁷

JCA and the ICRC recalled several other aircraft following Brown's aircraft that night. A few JCA aircraft went back to Uli the next night well under the cover of darkness to test the waters. Lindt advised the ICRC crews to fly a couple of flights to feel out the new environment. Lindt eventually made it to Lagos to protest, but the customs officials detained him and the aircrew flying him. The Nigerians denied Lindt an audience with any officials. The FMG declared Lindt *persona non grata*, then deported him on a commercial flight.⁷⁸ Lindt resigned shortly after that.⁷⁹ The ICRC would fly only a handful more flights on one day in August; the latter routed through Lagos for official inspections.⁸⁰ These flights carried hundreds of thousands of sorely needed smallpox and measles vaccinations but also marked a somber and frustrating end to the Red Cross airlift into Biafra.⁸¹

⁷⁴ International Review of the Red Cross, Jul 1969, 353.

⁷⁵ International Review of the Red Cross, Jul 1969, 361.

⁷⁶ Gould 135-136

⁷⁷ de St. Jorre, 331.

⁷⁸ International Review of the Red Cross, Jul 1969, 356.

⁷⁹ International Review of the Red Cross, Jul 1969, 362.

⁸⁰ International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 99, September 1969, 487.

⁸¹ International Review of the Red Cross, Sept 1969, 487.

While considering the ICRCs request to resume aid after the shoot down in August, the Nigerian Government issued its harshest and clearest warning to date. Nigerian Information Commissioner Chief Anthony Enahoro publicly insisted that any supplies by any route must go through Lagos and then implied that the Nigerian Air Force would again shoot down any plane attempting to break the blockade.⁸² Despite these threats the churches and relief groups carried on, and not just JCA.

The focus in this thesis thus far has been on the ICRC and the Church airlift from São Tomé since they constituted the bulk of the airlift. However, there were several other groups such as the Order of Malta. They flew dying children out of Biafra into Libreville to nurse them back to life at aid clinics and hospitals. Africa Concern operated out of Libreville and increased the frequency of its flights from after the shoot down. Mercy Missions flew an old Avro Anson that unknown forces downed with small arms while conducting an airdrop mission to a leper colony in dire need of supplies.⁸³ The French Red Cross also operated continuously out of Libreville. This chapter has undoubtedly neglected to mention more organizations and individuals that contributed to stem the starvation and death in Biafra. Now that this chapter has provided the context and operations of the Biafran Airlift, it is time to look at the actions of the United States in the crisis.

⁸² Draper, 179.

⁸³ Draper, 125.

Chapter Five – The United States and Biafra

As stated in the introduction, one aim of this thesis was to help the reader understand “the conditions and processes by which intervention is implemented as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy.”¹ Taken as a whole, the White House policy on the Nigerian Civil War was strikingly consistent through the Johnson and Nixon Administrations. President Nixon faced more pressure as awareness grew domestically over time. Nixon took the extra step to appoint a Special Nigeria-Biafra Relief Coordinator. Johnson’s approval to lease the eight C-97 aircraft had a much larger effect on the Biafran Airlift, than Nixon’s overture of a coordinator appointment.² Providing US military aircraft was the first bold break from appeasing the FMG (and by extension the British).³ In the talking points for Nixon’s trip to Europe, the continuation of Johnson’s non-intervention policy was elaborately labeled by his staff as a “high-relief, low-political silhouette policy.”⁴ In the end, this “double game” satiated power brokers in Congress, and public interest groups bent on humanitarianism while maintaining relations with the Nigerian Government to allow for extensive relations *and* relief after the Civil War.⁵

Despite such a policy, by April 1969 the United States had contributed \$56.5M (1969 dollars) to the relief effort in Nigeria.⁶ During testimony to Congress, Special Coordinator for Nigeria-Biafra Relief, Dr. Clyde Ferguson, Jr., highlights the pragmatic nature of US policy in the

¹ Western, 138.

² Arinze, Josh. *Moral Anguish: Richard Nixon and the Challenge of Biafra*. EBook location 23.

³ Foreign Relations Of The United States 1964–1968 Volume XXIV, Africa, Document 402

⁴ Foreign Relations Of The United States 1969–1976 VOLUME E–5, PART 1, Documents On Sub-Saharan Africa, 1969–1972, Document 28

⁵ Foreign Relations Of The United States 1969–1976 VOLUME E–5, PART 1, Documents On Sub-Saharan Africa, 1969–1972, Document 126

⁶ Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives Ninety-First Congress, First Session. Thursday, April 24, 1969, p 18 (Statement before the Senate Subcommittee for African Affairs, 4 October 1968)

context of the late 60s and early 70s. Congressman Benjamin S. Rosenthal (NY) baited Dr. Ferguson, stating, “It is frustrating that (in) some areas of the world we get all charged up for political settlements and other areas we move for military settlements and other areas we sit back and pray and send in carbohydrates.”⁷ Dr. Ferguson stressed that emergent Africa was quite different, and attempts to intervene politically or militarily faced: “Extreme sensitivities which relate to color, frankly, and some problems about the intervention of highly developed or superdeveloped powers into the political affairs of people who insist that they want to create their own political structures, their own social environment without the interference of Western Europe or North America.”⁸

For Dr. Ferguson and ultimately, the US foreign policy apparatus, these conditions justified economic and humanitarian intervention without political price tags. For the United States, context in the late 60s also included the quagmire in Vietnam, racial integration at home, and a rather hot Cold War. In analyzing the Nigerian Civil War, the distinct divide in literature based on vantage point and allegiances becomes clear. Nixon and Johnson faced the same polarized debate on the need for action and prudence of inaction.

This chapter will focus on five areas of the US experience with the Nigerian Civil War. First is the decision to lease US military aircraft to the ICRC and Churches. Second is the nature of the public and Congressional pressure on White House policy and action. Third are the diplomatic efforts to legitimize and protect the relief effort before and

⁷ Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives Ninety-First Congress, First Session. Thursday, April 24, 1969, p 22 (Statement before the Senate Subcommittee for African Affairs, 4 October 1968)

⁸ Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives Ninety-First Congress, First Session. Thursday, April 24, 1969, p 22 (Statement before the Senate Subcommittee for African Affairs, 4 October 1968)

after the ICRC DC-7 shoot down. The fourth focus area is the analysis of National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 11 and the subsequent response. They provide a fascinating look at military options provided to the President of the United States. The document trail on how the White House updated its policy until the end of the war is extensive and critical for deriving implications for today's operations. Fifth will be a look at the direct relief flights by the USAF under Operation GALLANT LIFT after the fall of Biafra. The aftermath of the Nigerian Civil War is important for US foreign policy calculations. With Operation GALLANT LIFT the US was able to maintain relations with Nigeria, placate the demand for action domestically, and keep pressure on the Gowon government to show restraint during its reconciliation with Biafra.

As seen in the previous chapter, increasing the quality and capacity of available aircraft was an indispensable part of mitigating the starvation in Biafra. With only one airfield limited to the periods of darkness, large aircraft designed for quick loading and offloading of cargo were essential. In a memo Rabbi A. James Rubin made clear such a need to the American Jewish Committee explaining how to convert the \$40,000 raised by 14 November 1968 into aid. Rabbi Rubin references conversations with Monsignor Landi of Caritas and James MacCracken of the World Church Council. Landi and MacCracken relayed to him their latest initiative to get C-130s (\$900,000) for the airlift. Rubin described to his organization how the relief organizations appreciated their plans to acquire and store 40 tons of food. However, since C-130s would triple the nightly aid into Uli, paying for ten percent of the US portion of the C-130 operation costs was the wiser course.⁹

⁹ Two Memoranda Regarding Leasing of Aircraft for Airlift Relief Efforts. Rudin, A. James (Nov. 14, 1968) AJC Digital Archives <http://ajcarchives.org/ajcarchive/DigitalArchive.aspx>

This memo followed an official response from William Gaud at USAID. Gaud denied the request for two C-130s. Gaud's official letter to Rabbi Tannebaum, Bishop Swanson, and Mr. McCracken is a response to telegrams by their organizations to Secretary of State Dean Rusk and President Johnson. This memo highlights the increasing difficult position faced by the State Department who doggedly supported working through the FMG and ICRC. In the letter, Gaud sends some discredit the way of the São Tomé airlift, associating it with the arms flights and questioning its legitimacy. Gaud concludes that "the main limitation on relief flights into Biafra is not too few relief planes, but air traffic congestion at the single major airstrip still operating in Biafran territory."¹⁰ Gaud's strawman argument relies on more operating locations in Biafra and major concessions by the FMG, neither of which would materialize. Better aircraft remained the paramount requirement.

The pressure to do more to help the aid organizations turned into action in late December 1968. In a memorandum to the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Walt Whitman Rostow, National Security Staffer and later Henry Kissinger's insider on Biafra, Roger Morris, laid out the strategic impact of giving the eight cargo planes to JCA and the ICRC.¹¹ Morris expected Secretary of State Rogers to bring up the issue with the President soon. He was making the hard sell to Johnson that "it is much easier to justify Globemasters to the Feds than to explain the refusal to Kennedy, McCormack, et al."¹² Morris highlighted that old airplanes now are better than new C-130s in the future and that this proposal "will cost us nothing, can save lives, and will, for the time being at least, lessen the Congressional heat here at

¹⁰ U.S. Department of State in a letter to Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, director interreligious affairs, explains that it cannot comply with requests that two Hercules aircraft be made available for an airlift. Gaud, William S. (Oct. 24, 1968) AJC Digital Archives <http://ajcarchives.org/ajcarchive/DigitalArchive.aspx>

¹¹ FRUS 1964–1968 Vol XXIV, Africa, Document 402

¹² FRUS 1964–1968 Vol XXIV, Africa, Document 402

home.”¹³ Morris explained out how DOD would sell the aircraft at scrap pricing and no US military personnel would be involved in the relief operation. Furthermore, the US would attach a clause stipulating the users would not employ the planes for military purposes. Morris acknowledged the Federal Military Government would object because “they regard the voluntary agencies as pro-Biafran and sometime gun runners” but in the end this was “manageable.”¹⁴

Kissinger wasted no time on Biafra, issuing NSSM 11 for policy options on the Nigerian Civil War. NSSM 11 was specific and directed the following:

The President has directed the preparation of two papers on the Nigerian civil war. One paper should consider the full range of alternative U.S. approaches and programs aimed at expediting and enlarging urgently the flow of relief to Biafra. This paper should include consideration of coordination, cost, timing and availability of resources.

The second paper should consider alternative views of U.S. interest in Nigeria and Biafra, the full range of basic policy choices open to the U.S. and the political consequences of alternative approaches to relief described in the first paper.¹⁵

More striking are Kissinger’s memorandum and background paper, submitted with the draft NSSM 11 request to President Nixon.

Kissinger’s background paper references recent USAID and DOD studies used to build the concise options laid out in the supplemental memorandum. The background paper provided for the new president in this memo is noteworthy for its frankness and clarity. Kissinger

¹³FRUS 1964–1968 Vol XXIV, Africa, Document 402

¹⁴ FRUS 1964–1968 Vol XXIV, Africa, Document 402

¹⁵ Foreign Relations of the United States 1969–1976 Volume E–5, Part 1, Documents on Sub-Saharan Africa, 1969–1972, Document 26

describes Gowon and the FMG as conducting “the war with often incredible ineptness, both in battle and public relations. They tolerate the Red Cross relief operation on both sides but would hardly be averse to winning by starvation.”¹⁶ He goes on to mention the FMG’s latest outrage at the transfer of the eight C-97s to the relief groups. Kissinger frankly assesses that the FMG subscribes to the simple logic that food keeps the rebellion operating.

In describing Biafra, he describes the Igbos as the “wandering Jews of West Africa -- gifted, aggressive, Westernized; at best envied and resented, but mostly despised by the mass of their neighbors in the Federation.” He admires their fight against weighty odds and describes their “cynical public relations use of the starvation” as “brilliant.” Kissinger then describes the stalemate in early 1969 with the following: “The rebels seem more aware than before of their desperate food situation, but are convinced they can hold out (or will be bailed out) until the Feds collapse. Short of that, Biafra is almost certainly unable to win the war militarily. If Gowon (as he likes to see himself) is Lincoln fighting it out in the Wilderness with draft riots and copperheads back home, Ojukwu is Jeff Davis before Gettysburg with time on the side of secession.”¹⁷

Following the update on the belligerents, the memorandum lists six realities that Kissinger insists the president must weigh regardless of policy. First, he warns against including “irrelevant experiences” in decision-making. Kissinger contrasts the Congo where relatively limited US assistance made a difference.¹⁸ He argues that the crisis in Nigeria is “real war.” Next is the declaration that the moral justification is present

¹⁶ Foreign Relations of the United States 1969–1976 Volume E–5, Part 1, Documents on Sub-Saharan Africa, 1969–1972, Document 25

¹⁷ FRUS 1969–1976 Vol E–5, Part 1, Sub-Sahara Africa, 1969–1972, Document 25

¹⁸ FRUS 1969–1976 Vol E–5, Part 1, Sub-Sahara Africa, 1969–1972, Document 25

for “every reasonable effort,” though he follows this closely with need to define “reasonable” based on long-term interests. Third, he takes a military intervention off the table and insists that though US involvement is important, it will not be *the* solution. Next, the memorandum highlights that America’s leverage exists only with the FMG and thus the necessity of maintaining an amicable, even if minimally so, relationship. Fifth, the memo considers the possibility of atrocities in the event of a Nigerian victory. There is faith in Gowon; the memo describes him as “an honorable man who knows Nigerian unity would be lost if victory led to mass murder.”¹⁹ Despite such assurances, the memo makes clear the need for the US to ditch its association with the “One Nigeria” slogan if atrocities do materialize. Finally, the memorandum addresses the temporal aspect of the Biafra problem as it stood in early 1969.²⁰ Mainly that ending the conflict is the only real solution to the humanitarian disaster and that growing starvation and the weakening of Gowon’s internal coalition meant that every day the conflict progressed, the US’s ability to shape it also declined.

Tab B in the memorandum, titled Relief Options, starts with laying out the need in Biafra. The author acknowledges, “Estimates vary widely because of the very fluid situation in Biafra” the figures provided were 1.5 to 3.5 million people in danger in the next 4-6 months. The memorandum provided calculations for minimum dietary requirements to address this need, which equaled 30 to 40,000 tons a month. Finally, before getting to technical options of airlift, the memorandum lays out “where others stand” to include the British, French, Soviets, Africans, and the American public and Congress. The memorandum then describes the “present conditions” of the JCA and ICRC airlifts combined. The airlift in January 1969 consisted of 15-18 planes delivering close to

¹⁹ FRUS 1969–1976 Vol E–5, Part 1, Sub-Sahara Africa, 1969–1972, Document 25

²⁰ FRUS 1969–1976 Vol E–5, Part 1, Sub-Sahara Africa, 1969–1972, Document 25

4,000 tons a month. The three dominant “conditions” were hazardous night operations, the intermixing with arms flights at Uli, and vulnerability to Federal attack. Table 1 below displays the “step-up” options presented in the memorandum. Each option amplifies the scale of the relief operation through a mixture of more transport aircraft, longer operating windows (daytime), or even use of a land corridor. Noteworthy is the associated cost estimates with each cumulative option.

Table 1. Tab B – Relief Options, from the 28 January 1969 Memo from Kissinger to Nixon seeking approval to publish NSSM 11²¹

Description				
STEP-UP ONE	STEP-UP TWO	STEP-UP THREE	STEP-UP FOUR	STEP-UP FIVE
Substitute larger planes = 8,000 tons per month maximum available commercially	Dayflights, substitute = 12,000 tons per month maximum 15 C-130-type aircraft	Add Air Drops to Step-Up Two = 23, 000 tons per month maximum with 10 more C-130-type aircraft	Day flights, 35 aircraft = 30 - 40,000 tons per month maximum with 17-ton capacity	Land relief corridor = 35 to 45,000 tons per month maximum into Biafra combined with present relief flights
Conditions				
Same as present airlift	Major improvement of airfield facilities in Biafra and on islands	Additional base airfields since islands at capacity in Step-Up Two	Major involvement US military personnel and aircraft	Agreement by Federal Government and Biafra
Added airfield maintenance on islands and in Biafra	Biafran agreement to day flights or construction of second airfield	Additional personnel (100 -200) again involving US Military	Security and maintenance usually requested by Joint Chiefs	Some improvement of roads and bridges
	Recruitment of new crews, probably making necessary use of US military personnel	Additional ground control to insure distribution in Biafra	Massive reconstruction of present airfields (amounting to U.S. take-over)	Possible provision of additional trucks and ferries
			Major improvement distribution facilities in Biafra	Improvement of port and storage facilities in Federal territory
			Biafra Biafran agreement to day flights or second airfield	Added distribution in Biafra
Cost				
Cost: \$3 - 4 million for lease or sale of aircraft	Cost: \$16 million per month for operations \$2-3 million for airfield improvement or construction	Cost : \$36 million per month for operations \$3 - 4 million anticipated rental for additional fields	Cost: estimated \$200 million minimum total for 3-4 months	Cost: \$8 million per month for operations

Not listed in the Table 1 but included in the memorandum were the perceived “political constraints” each option levied on the US. The tone

²¹ FRUS 1969–1976 Vol E–5, Part 1, Sub-Sahara Africa, 1969–1972, Document 25

of the memorandum is frank. It presents the political status quo by stating, “Each Step-Up would be heavily dependent on US initiative, money and equipment. Most require US personnel. Others have shown by now that they lack either the resources, the will, or both.”²² The US would never go even as far Step-Up One. Yet, it appears that process of designing and weighing the courses of action helped to provide the clarity needed strike a balance between the urge *to do something* and the pragmatic assessment that options two through five were unrealistic.

The document titled “Biafra Relief: Principal Policy Options Summary,” prepared for the 14 February 1969 NSC meeting on the Nigerian Civil War, reveals the outcome of the NSSM 11 process.²³ The paper lays bare the primary tension of the US policy on the Biafran crisis. Declaring that although the US avoids direct involvement in politics or relief, it gets in as “much food as possible.”²⁴ Recognizing Nigeria and endorsing reunification on one hand while funding 60% of the relief operation to Biafra on the other was quite the political tightrope. This tension kept the relationship with the FMG teetering on the brink of dissolution. The sale of eight C-97s to the relief groups the previous fall brought an angry outcry. The authors of the NSC paper were frank in assessing: “All our experts agree that another expansion, in the context of present policy, will probably provoke a crisis, perhaps involving violence to our 5,200 citizens in Nigeria”.²⁵ Yet, the status quo relief was failing, driving what the paper acknowledged as the “moral dilemma and mounting domestic pressure” for action.²⁶

²² FRUS 1969–1976 Vol E–5, Part 1, Sub-Sahara Africa, 1969–1972, Document 25

²³ Foreign Relations of the United States 1969–1976 Volume E–5, Part 1, Documents on Sub-Saharan Africa, 1969–1972, Document 33

²⁴ FRUS 1969–1976 Vol E–5, Part 1, Sub-Sahara Africa, 1969–1972, Document 33

²⁵ FRUS 1969–1976 Vol E–5, Part 1, Sub-Sahara Africa, 1969–1972, Document 33

²⁶ FRUS 1969–1976 Vol E–5, Part 1, Sub-Sahara Africa, 1969–1972, Document 33

As for options, it was clear how the bureaucracy presented them to the President by the time of the NSC meeting. There was little change in the needs assessment or technical aspects from Kissinger's internal memo. However, the actual six options presented in detail were in effect varying levels of interventions and more distinctly, choosing sides. This document reveals that there were only two greater courses of action presented to the President. The first course of action was committing to the relief outlook of the present policy, which was Option 1 in the longer NSC policy paper.²⁷ The other path entailed expanding relief. Such an expansion required the US to increase backing of the Federals *officially* in some way to allow for the increased *de facto* support of Biafra with aid.²⁸ The second path was broken down across six scalable options. Option 3 was the extreme "back the FMG" example where the US would provide military support to the Nigerians to, in theory end the war faster. Simultaneously the US would boost relief deliveries to Biafra. Option 6 was the other pole—shifting support towards a Biafra away from Nigeria.²⁹

As far-fetched as Option 6 may seem now, it underscores the pressure Nixon faced on the foreign policy front. Kissinger laid out the context of the public and congressional pressure in another memorandum. Kissinger listed the following: "Public and Congressional pressures bear generally on three main questions: (1) what are we doing about the Federal embargo on relief? (2) Why can't we take some initiative to break the impasse caused by Biafran insistence that any relief corridor be guaranteed against surprise Federal violation? and (3) Is

²⁷ Foreign Relations of the United States 1969–1976 Volume E–5, Part 1, Documents on Sub-Saharan Africa, 1969–1972, Document 30

²⁸ FRUS 1969–1976 Vol E–5, Part 1, Sub-Sahara Africa, 1969–1972, Document 33

²⁹ FRUS 1969–1976 Vol E–5, Part 1, Sub-Sahara Africa, 1969–1972, Document 33

our relief policy a captive of a pro-Federal bias in our broader policy toward the civil war?"³⁰

Kissinger described how "The public outcry has been passionate if not always sophisticated."³¹ In Congress, Biafra joined unlikely partners "such as Kennedy and McCarthy, Brooke and Russell, Lukens and Lowenstein."³² The pressure was intense and seemed likely to grow. Senator Kennedy was publicly beginning to push for an independent Biafra. The public movement was well-financed, organized, and inseparable from Vietnam. Kissinger highlighted the irony of the "same people who picket on our 'interference' in Asia also demand we force-feed the starving Nigerians."³³ Many charity groups and organizations contributed to the relief effort. Some went beyond charity and into activism; one such group was The American Committee to Keep Biafra Alive (ACKBA).

ACKBA was the dominant organization in the United States that formed in response to the Nigerian Civil War. ACKBA not only called for the United States to do more but also condemned the United Nations for doing nothing. In the article, "'And starvation is the grim reaper': the American Committee to Keep Biafra Alive and the genocide question during the Nigerian civil war, 1968–70," Brian McNeil explores the growth of the group and looks specifically at its claims of genocide in Biafra.³⁴ An ACKBA member stated "We will campaign for the birth of a nation as the only way to avoid the death of a people."³⁵ ACKBA

³⁰ Foreign Relations of the United States 1969–1976 Volume E–5, Part 1, Documents on Sub-Saharan Africa, 1969–1972, Document 82

³¹ FRUS 1969–1976 Vol E–5, Part 1, Sub-Sahara Africa, 1969–1972, Document 25

³² FRUS 1969–1976 Vol E–5, Part 1, Sub-Sahara Africa, 1969–1972, Document 25

³³ FRUS 1969–1976 Vol E–5, Part 1, Sub-Sahara Africa, 1969–1972, Document 25

³⁴ Brian McNeil "'And starvation is the grim reaper': the American Committee to Keep Biafra Alive and the genocide question during the Nigerian civil war, 1968–70," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 16:2-3, 317-336, DOI: 10.1080/14623528.2014.936723

³⁵ Quoted in McNeil, 320.

redefined genocide by linking “Biafran identity to the Biafran state.”³⁶ Taking this statement to its logical conclusion, the Federal attempt at “One Nigeria” through force is genocide.³⁷ Spending upwards of \$100,000 in 1969 to lobby Congress towards action, ACKBA failed to see their goal of Biafran sovereignty materialize, but what was the committee’s impact on the airlift?³⁸

ACKBA started out along the lines of the other 200 or so groups that organized to help Biafra. ACKBA led public protests, advertised in major newspapers like the *New York Times*, lobbied Senators and Congressmen directly, and urged citizens to write letters to their representatives concerning Biafra.³⁹ ACKBA wanted to get the US moving towards relief, specifically calling for a “formal channel of humanitarian aid which would act independent of political, social, or economic considerations to insure personal and group security.”⁴⁰ ACKBA’s members believed formal US involvement would halt the starvation, its primary goal. ACKBA sought to make noise on the crisis, not crusade for Biafran independence.⁴¹

However, ACKBA produced documents that began the conversation about the legality of humanitarian intervention in Biafra. A legal pamphlet the committee sponsored through Yale Law professors, who were working pro bono, made it all the way to the UN.⁴² Their legal advisers concluded that in theory the UN could act within the bounds of

³⁶ McNeil, 317.

³⁷ McNeil, 317.

³⁸ Ernest W. Lejeve, “The ‘Biafra Lobby’ and US. Foreign Policy,” available at http://worldview.carnegiecouncil.org/archive/worldview/1969/02/1754.html/_res/id=sa_File1/v12_i002_a004.pdf

³⁹ McNeil, 323.

⁴⁰ McNeil, 324.

⁴¹ McNeil, 324.

⁴² McNeil, 326.

its charter in Biafra.⁴³ ACKBA member Susan Durr established a friendship with Roger Morris, the lead Nigeria NSC staffer. Morris and Durr talked on a weekly basis, exchanging information on the Biafran situation for the remainder of the war. Many of the ACKBA members served in the Peace Corps in Nigeria and were by Western standards, experts on the region. Morris leaned towards many of the positions advocated by the ACKBA and pressed Kissinger and President Nixon to pursue a more vigorous response to the conflict.⁴⁴ The committee's connection of politics to humanitarianism stood directly in the face of US foreign policy goals on the Nigerian Civil War. From the beginning of the conflict, first Johnson, and later Nixon, consistently declared that they only recognized the Nigerian government and valued a single political entity within its territory boundaries.⁴⁵

To ACKBA US policy was reckless and immoral. Seeing no progress on formal relief arrangements, the committee shifted its stance in October 1968 and determined that the only way to end genocide in Eastern Nigeria was for Biafrans to protect themselves. A Biafran sovereign state was the first and foremost mechanism for that. McNeil describes how ACKBA President Paul Connect diagnosed the crisis for Biafrans as “not a lack of food but a political problem in which the Igbo would be perpetually denied fundamental human rights within a united Nigeria.”⁴⁶

The excursion on ACKBA establishes the globally connected nature of the Nigerian Civil War. It solidifies the Biafran Airlift as a credible source in providing lessons for those advising policymakers in today's globalized and interconnected world. Civil-military relations may be a

⁴³McNeil, 326.

⁴⁴ McNeil, 327.

⁴⁵ McNeil, 328.

⁴⁶ McNeil 329

“dialogue of unequals” but this does not excuse military leaders and their staffs from understanding where political impetus is originating.⁴⁷ With the White House’s growing comfort to utilize smaller deployments of military forces and assets against limited conflict and periphery interests, awareness of the political context both abroad and domestically is paramount. Activism may lead to intervention but may also provide an opportunity to design an *efficient* solution that bounds the issue from degenerating into something worse.

Chapter Four covered the shoot down of the Red Cross DC-7 and its impact on the execution of the airlift. Today’s senior leaders and policy makers should consider this event above all others as they contemplate supporting relief efforts, whether directly, indirectly, or through technical support. The day after the attack the State Department issued a bland press statement condemning the attack. It read “While recognizing the problem created by the intermingling of arms flights and relief flights, the United States Government deplores this attack,” and further that “This incident underlines the urgency of alternative relief arrangements for daylight flights and surface corridors.”⁴⁸ The reference to “intermingling of arms flights and relief flights” made it sound as if planes carrying food to Biafra also had arms onboard. Josh Arinze accuses the State Department of being outright misleading in the way it described the “intermingling.” Arinze insists, “In fact this was not the case. The International Committee of the Red Cross, whose plane was shot down, had always scrupulously followed a strict policy of providing purely humanitarian assistance to civilians on both sides of wars. ICRC relief transports do not carry arms; in fact, under

⁴⁷ Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 12.

⁴⁸ Foreign Relations of the United States 1969–1976 Volume E–5, Part 1, Documents on Sub-Saharan Africa, 1969–1972, Document 72

ICRC rules, it is unthinkable for them to do so.”⁴⁹ Likewise, JCA also adhered to a strict policy of not mixing aid with arms from São Tomé.⁵⁰

This statement, after Nigerian MiG-17s shot down a clearly marked Red Cross aircraft at dusk, showed how entrenched the State Department was in its desire to stay with the FMG. Arinze highlights that the nuance of the day versus night flights issue was likely confusing to the public, but it was the primary demand the FMG had used to stifle the relief effort. The State Department had promoted “daylight flights as a panacea” and its statement on the shoot down of the Red Cross DC-7 “carefully avoided drawing attention to an inconvenient fact, namely that the Nigerian Air Force actually shot the aircraft down in daylight, not at night.”⁵¹ Additionally, it became clear that efforts to establish a river corridor were no longer acceptable to the FMG. The diplomatic overtures were simply a veiled effort to quiet the vocal congressional representatives and the Biafra Lobby.⁵²

On the same day as the State Department release, the Nigerian Air Force Chief, Colonel Shittu Alao, commented on the difficulty in identifying aircraft but then added: “As far as we’re concerned we are hitting at anything flying into Biafra, Red Cross or not.” Colonel Alao’s frankness undermined any basis for daylight flights as an acceptable course of action.⁵³ Nigeria did not pay a political price for the Red Cross shoot down. With Colonel Alao’s comments and the deliberate and stepped eviction of the Red Cross in the month that followed, the

⁴⁹ Josh Arinze, *Moral Anguish: Richard Nixon and the Challenge of Biafra*, 2011. (Kindle Locations 2437-2440). Kindle Edition.

⁵⁰ Arinze, 2444-2446.

⁵¹ Arinze, 2465-2467.

⁵² Foreign Relations of the United States 1969–1976 Volume E–5, Part 1, Documents on Sub-Saharan Africa, 1969–1972, Document 80

⁵³ Arinze, 2485-2486.

escalation of force was not a mere blunder. Arinze concludes “except for official statements deploring the attack, the international reaction remained muted, and the default mindset of bowing to Nigeria’s ‘sovereignty’ continued to prevail.”⁵⁴

Despite the constant declared fear of the FMG breaking off their relationship with the United States, there was little detailed discussion of the second and third order effects of such a break. Nigerian Ambassador Joe Iyalla’s complaints to Roger Morris in October 1969 summarize the formal complaints by the Nigerians to US officials. Iyalla mentioned as example transgressions “the public condemnation of Nigeria over the shoot-down of the Red Cross relief plane,” “failure to supply arms or even diplomatic support,” “tolerance of Biafran propaganda” and finally “U.S. support for the Joint Church Aid relief flights.”⁵⁵ Except the support to JCA, the other accusations were either so basic to the United States core positions in foreign policy or outside its control that they should hardly draw any serious thought when considering policy.

President Nixon went through three distinct phases on the Nigerian crisis. He initially agreed to continuing U.S. support for Nigeria. By May, Nixon made it clear to Kissinger that he was ready for a change in policy and flirted with recognition. As the State Department upped its resistance, Kissinger was caught between the President and senior representatives from State. Nixon discreetly sought to broker a peace.⁵⁶

Nixon never used his authority to enforce his guidance. Similar to the sale of the eight C-97s to the relief groups, the final effort to support the beleaguered population in the former Biafra – Operation GALLANT

⁵⁴ Arinze, 2500-2504.

⁵⁵ Arinze, 2958-2960.

⁵⁶ Arinze, 2688-2690.

LIFT – mostly was the result of Congressional pressure on the White House. As Ojukwu fled and Biafra surrendered, many thought the humanitarian situation would worsen in the near-term in eastern Nigeria. Nigerian forces overran Uli, shutting down the only rapid link to the inner parts of the territory. The Nigerian Government banned many of the groups that had “supported” Biafra from the postwar relief effort. Naturally, these groups were ideally suited and positioned to help the population after the war.⁵⁷ The Nigerians banned the use of Uli airstrip for aid distribution as “it considered Uli an unacceptable symbol of Biafra’s wartime resistance.”⁵⁸

Even in the postwar phase of the crisis, the State Department remained unmoved on action in eastern Nigeria, publishing an estimate that only some 20,000 people were at risk of death in the near term.⁵⁹ Such low numbers were quite in contrast to Dr. Davida Taylor’s estimate testifying before the Senate on 22 January 1970. Responding to Senator Ted Kennedy’s questioning, Dr. Taylor repeated her statement made previously to the US Embassy in Libreville that “a million people could die if massive amounts of food were not delivered immediately.”⁶⁰ Dr. Taylor’s figures in her testimony matched those of Fathers Michael and Kevin Doheny for similar reasons. They described new logistical and medical crises evolving due to the eviction of the relief workers the associated loss of expertise and logistical nodes that resulted.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Oyinbo 116

⁵⁸ Arinze, 2859-2863.

⁵⁹ Arinze, 2859-2863.

⁶⁰ Hearings Before The Subcommittee To Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapees of The Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate, Ninety-First Congress, Second Session – Part 2. January 21-22, 1970, 189

⁶¹ Hearings Before The Subcommittee To Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapees of Of The Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate, Ninety-First Congress, Second Session – Part 2. January 21-22, 1970, 190-193

Following this trio's testimony, was the interrogation of Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, David Newsom and Special Coordinator for Nigerian Relief, Clyde Ferguson. The Senate sub-committee received access to official reports (not in the press) just before the session that painted a much darker picture than Newsom and Ferguson had briefed the day before to the same Senators. Reading the transcripts now, the frustration of Senator Kennedy and Goodell is distinct, as Newsom and Ferguson lay out renewed problems with the "security situation" and stipulations by the Nigerian Government that were effectively blocking aid to eastern Nigeria.⁶² Reports coming out of Nigeria would soon corroborate Kennedy and Goodell's concerns over lack of access and aid to Eastern Nigeria.

Andrew Borowiec's reporting for the *Washington Star* in the aftermath of the conflict displayed a similar short-lived optimism. His article on 18 January 1970 complimented the Nigerian Government for its lack of gloating and fanfare in victory but indicated, "there is no rush" on aid.⁶³ By 21 January 1970, the title of his next article for the *Star* was "Death, Not Food, Is Awaiting Many Biafran Refugees," describing that there was "no open hostility of the victors towards the vanquished. There is simply indifference."⁶⁴ Borowiec's articles also make clear that even if Lagos was proactive, it lacked the capacity and capability to get relief into the former rebel enclave. He reported that the Red Cross has "enough rations to feed 200,000 people for two days. There are an estimated 1 million starving people in the area. The Food is being delivered by one truck and even this ramshackle vehicle is often

⁶² Hearings Before The Subcommittee To Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapees of Of The Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate, Ninety-First Congress, Second Session – Part 2. January 21-22, 1970, 203-205

⁶³ Borowiec, Andrew "There Is No Elation in Lagos" *Washington Star*, 18 January 1970.

⁶⁴ Borowiec, Andrew "Death, Not Food, Is Awaiting Many Biafran Refugees," *Washington Star*, 21 January 1970

commandeered by the army.”⁶⁵ As late as the 29 January 1970 Borowiec wrote concerning Gowon’s announced plan to spend \$3 billion to repair and reintegrate Eastern Nigeria. Borowiec concluded that “the Nigerian state machinery is far from being geared to a concerted, sweeping effort. For example, very little has been done to aid towns and villages, on the fringes of the Biafran bastion, captured by federal troops *as long as one year ago*.”⁶⁶ Despite its other significant international commitments, there was one country that did have the capacity: the United States.

From the released documents, the momentum for Operation GALLANT LIFT picked up around 22-23 January 1970. The pressure that Goodell and Kennedy exerted on Newsome during Senate testimony on 21 and 22 January was followed by a phone call between Henry Kissinger and Senator Ted Kennedy. The two spoke on the phone and earnestly worked together to break the diplomatic fortress that was preventing aid to eastern Nigeria.⁶⁷ Kissinger makes it very clear that there was political consensus between the White House and Kennedy on large-scale US support for relief to Eastern Nigeria.⁶⁸ The final and symbolic solution was for the US Air Force’s Military Airlift Command (MAC) to fly 436.5 tons of supplies, consisting of jeeps, trucks, generators, and a complete field hospital. In doing so, they had to paint over US military markings on the C-141 Starlifter aircraft used in the operation for Nigeria to accept the supplies.⁶⁹

What transpired in the weeks that followed was an all-out effort to produce a visible and official US relief presence in Nigeria. It is clear the

⁶⁵ Borowiec, Andrew “Death, Not Food, Is Awaiting Many Biafran Refugees,” *Washington Star*, 21 January 1970

⁶⁶ Borowiec, Andrew “Nigeria Airs Biafra Plan,” *Washington Star*, 29 January 1970.

⁶⁷ Foreign Relations of the United States 1969–1976 Volume E–5, Part 1, Documents on Sub-Saharan Africa, 1969–1972, Documents 176

⁶⁸ FRUS 1969–1976 Vol. E–5, Part 1, Sub Sahara Africa, 1969–1972, Document 176

⁶⁹ History of Military Airlift Command (MAC), Volume I, 30 June 1970, 36.

US Embassy in Nigeria was feeling intense pressure to convince the Nigerians to accept the US aid. Nigeria was stalwart in its desire to maintain complete sovereignty of action within its borders.⁷⁰ MAC issued an Operational Order as early as 12 January that prepared for a relief force and aircraft in Nigeria for a 60-90 day mission.⁷¹ This Order included the provision of logistical support for an international observer team as required.⁷²

Gowon made it clear, however, that he did not want foreign military personnel or aircraft involved in the relief operation to include landing at Lagos. President Nixon had made a rather open-ended offer of support and quickly allocated \$10 million for relief.⁷³ Thus, MAC scratched their initial plan and “the official policy was to wait and see whether Nigeria wished to accept such aid and how it could be made available.”⁷⁴ Since stocks of food and other critical items were items mostly available in and around the country, the Nigerians looked to address transportation and equipment deficiencies.⁷⁵ Lagos requested the above listed cargo and requested that the C-141s be demilitarized.⁷⁶ The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) then authorized the Air Force to assign six C-141 aircraft to transport relief materials from United States to Nigeria.⁷⁷ To satisfy the Nigerian requirement to reduce flagrant evidence of American involvement, the Air Force removed all external military markings and only labeled them with the words “United States of America,” a small flag, and the original serial numbers.⁷⁸

⁷⁰ de St Jorre, 403.

⁷¹ MAC History, 35.

⁷² MAC History, 35.

⁷³ MAC History, 36.

⁷⁴ MAC History, 36.

⁷⁵ Haulman, 305.

⁷⁶ MAC History, 36.

⁷⁷ MAC History 36

⁷⁸ MAC History 36

With approvals, funding, and political sensitivities secured, USAID and DOD now raced against the clock to get aid to Nigeria. Military planners produced a general concept of operations to position the relief items at central points in the United States coordinated through the USAID. The primary route would be from the East Coast to Ascension Island and then on to Ikeja Airfield in Lagos, Nigeria. On 25 January, the JCS issued the plan for a 21-mission airlift beginning 27 January 1970.⁷⁹ After receiving guidance and assessments of Ikeja from the Air Force Staff, MAC issued the operations order that designated 21st Air Force to lead the operation.⁸⁰ They selected Charleston AFB as the Continental United States (CONUS) departure point. The diplomatic clearances from Great Britain and Nigeria required detail planning, as well as mission watch during execution, to ensure planes arrived and offloaded during the very small windows that Lagos allowed.

As flight planning and diplomatic clearances fell into place it became clear that USAID's ability to gather up the requested equipment was the real challenge. In February of 1993, US diplomatic oral historian Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed William Haven North, who served as the USAID Director for Central and West Africa Affairs during the Nigerian Crisis.⁸¹ Haven described the logistical hurdles he had to overcome as USAID frantically responded when Nigeria finally allowed the US to help. Haven explained how Henry Kissinger himself was calling US truck manufacturers trying to get the Nigerian wish list together in time to position at Charleston.⁸² The trucks were being assembled all over the country then shipped to Charleston; even at the rate of three

⁷⁹ MAC History 37

⁸⁰ MAC History 37

⁸¹ Moments in U.S. Diplomatic History, "The Famine in Biafra — USAID's Response to the Nigerian Civil War," Available at <http://adst.org/2014/05/the-famine-in-biafra-usaids-response-to-the-nigerian-civil-war/>

⁸² Moments in U.S. Diplomatic History, "The Famine in Biafra — USAID's Response to the Nigerian Civil War."

flights per day, USAID struggled to fill the planes heading to Nigeria. Haven describes how the Air Force was “furious” asking where the cargo was.⁸³ One can forgive the “The Air Force” for its impatience, the British only granted clearance for 21 flights to operate through Ascension Island. That clearance equated to two flights a day, starting 27 January but Ascension was only one stop in the supply route to coordinate. The U.S. sought a blanket clearance for all flights into Lagos but the Nigerian government also refused this. Instead, the embassy only negotiated clearances for a three-hour window for a few flights daily.⁸⁴

Despite these challenges, MAC was up to the task. After 17 missions, it reduced the schedule to one flight a day because of the lack of cargo.⁸⁵ In a fitting conclusion, Haven described GALLANT LIFT as “an extraordinary operation. Whether it did any good or not, whether the equipment was used effectively or not, I don’t know, but it made the political statement of our responsiveness to the requests and, perhaps, tempered the Nigerian Government’s actions against the Biafrans. That was the crest of the crisis.”⁸⁶

⁸³ Moments in U.S. Diplomatic History, “The Famine in Biafra — USAID’s Response to the Nigerian Civil War.”

⁸⁴ MAC History 38

⁸⁵ MAC History 38

⁸⁶ Moments in U.S. Diplomatic History, “The Famine in Biafra — USAID’s Response to the Nigerian Civil War,”

Chapter Six – Implications

Until now, this thesis has avoided assessing the effectiveness of the US response to the Biafran Crisis. Using modern standards provided by Chapter Three's breakout of current policy and doctrine, the United States would actually score well on the *methods* it used in Biafra. The US focused on providing indirect assistance and infrastructure support as recommended by the Oslo Guidelines. All its aid and support went through NGOs, IGOs, and PVOs just as USAID/OFDA strives to do today. The National Security Council actually framed the analysis of the relief effort along the lines of the UNDAC Handbook's four main factors that largely shape a humanitarian relief effort: capacity of the infrastructure, availability and quality of transport assets in the country, politics of the situation, and civil conflict in the area of operations.

While studying the case of the Biafran Airlift during the Nigerian Civil War, the three implications mentioned in the introduction start to crystalize as technical, environmental, and political propositions. The politics and civil conflict limited the availability of infrastructure and basing to such a degree that the quality and quantity of transport platforms were *the* dominant considerations throughout. The Nigerian military completely cut Biafra's access to the outside world by land or sea. There was only one suitable airfield for relief, and its use was limited to periods of darkness. In the half-century since the Nigerian Civil War, the strides in Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs, Remotely Piloted Aircraft [RPAs] or more commonly as "Drones"), offer the greatest opportunity to improve the ability to deliver aid in any current or future conflict that resembles Biafra.

Unmanned Aircraft (and increasingly more so, unmanned ground and underwater vehicles (UGVs and UUVs)) have truly changed the

conduct and character of warfare. With the proper investment and focus, they stand to have an even bigger impact on humanitarian operations in the conflict zone. DOD employed unmanned cargo aircraft such as the rotary wing K-MAX UAV in Afghanistan. The K-MAX is crossing over into the commercial industry in a variety of roles.¹

Non-profits and small startup companies have looked to provide humanitarian aid and medical supplies from Syria to Rwanda with their own original UAVs.² Once such group was the Syria Airlift Project. Led by Uplift Aeronautics, the Project set out on its charter to deliver humanitarian aid to besieged communities.³ Unfortunately, the effort dissolved, mostly for lack of funding but also from the exhaustion of its volunteers that accompanies being first in the arena. Setbacks in engineering, legal challenges, software, and manpower may have caused Uplift Aeronautics to fold, but their setback only further highlights the USG's glaring need for robots delivering aid in a conflict zone. One avenue the USG can rapidly acquire such a capability is through government-private partnerships. Founder and SAASS graduate Mark Jacobsen laid out the challenges in the group's final letter stating, "We founded Uplift Aeronautics to harness emerging and experimental technologies in extremely high-risk environments. Our aim was to reach desperate populations with no ability to offer a return on investment. The high risks and the absence of a profit motive made it almost impossible to find traditional investment."⁴

The fact that a half century later the US lacks the ability to provide a different and more effective solution to delivering aid in contested

¹ Clay Dillow, "Battle-tested Marine Corps' drone to hit the commercial market" *Fortune Magazine*, July 17, 2015, available at <http://fortune.com/2015/07/17/marine-corps-drone-helicopter/>

² Mark Jacobsen, Uplift Aeronautics Final Letter.

³ Jacobsen

⁴ Jacobsen

environments, when our nation demands it, is why Biafra still matters. A robust fleet of unmanned aircraft, throughput technologies, and organizational knowledge sought by Jacobsen would go a long way towards easing the type of suffering the world watched in Biafra and sees daily in Syria and elsewhere. More importantly, it would give leaders and policy makers more tools and options to design the application of their instruments of national power. Since policy makers often look to DOD first, the USAF has an obvious role in shaping the path our nation takes to derive an unmanned airlift capability. This remains true even if US strategists envision using these systems in an indirect manner or as leased platforms to NGOs.

United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM) and specifically Air Mobility Command (AMC) should explore developing capabilities in unmanned relief systems and the associated architecture, institutional knowledge, and logistics to employ such systems. AMC is exceptional at disaster relief *and* wartime logistics in permissive environments. It possesses unique capabilities nested in its Contingency Response Wings that can play a key role in relief efforts in austere or distressed areas.

AMC should also evolve and adapt its capabilities to environments where access is questionable, risky, and politically sensitive to meet the kind of challenges the Biafran Airlift posed to President Nixon. This thesis lacks the scope to lay out a strategy for AMC to pursue unmanned acquisition, much less a requirements document for the AMC-X unmanned cargo aircraft (UCA). Instead, those staff officers given the task to do so should look to the Biafran Airlift and the challenges faced by the Red Cross and Joint Church Aid when they are imagining why and how humanitarian relief operations fit into our national interests.

The conditions affecting Biafra fifty years ago, or Syria today, fall nicely into the broad environmental categorizations of complex emergency and the gray zone. Kapusta's White Paper on the gray zone, mentioned in Chapter 1, concludes by advising the reader to focus on opportunities and specialization when operating in such an environment. He introduces the Strength-Weakness-Opportunity-Threat Model as a way to "open other opportunities not available in military decision making models".⁵ Kapusta could just as easily be commenting on United States foreign policy writ large, which could stand to orient towards a less military-minded model.

Kapusta speaks of specialization and the need for military forces trained for the gray zone vice conventional war. He describes these forces as smaller, more agile, and rapidly deployable with different skill sets and orientations.⁶ The requirements and environments for today's humanitarian operations in many ways provide similar challenges to what SOCOM is now coming to grips with. Just as Kapusta concludes, "The United States already has most of the tools required to secure and advance its national security interests in the gray zone" it is equally well equipped in the humanitarian realm. Although well equipped, Kapusta insists that the United States "must evolve its organizational, intellectual and institutional models to flourish in the middle ground between war and peace and avoid the predictability and rigidity characterizing its actions since the end of the Cold War."⁷ The United States can learn from its own experience and decisions in Biafra to execute its foreign policy with greater effectiveness by utilizing a new model.

⁵ Kapusta, 8.

⁶ Kapusta, 9.

⁷ Kapusta, 9.

Just as Kapusta called for a renewed focus on cost analysis of US strategy, Benjamin Valentino insists Americans have seriously underappreciated the “moral, political, and economic price involved” with interventions.⁸ In a concise and sweeping analysis, Valentino uses Bosnia, Haiti, Kosovo, Somalia, Iraq, Libya, and many more cases to tally the costs of military interventions. Highlighting that those in favor of humanitarian interventions “usually make their case in terms of the United States’ moral responsibilities,” Valentino insists that “On the ground the ethical clarity that advocates of human rights have associated with such actions –saving innocent lives—has almost always been blurred by a much more complicated reality.”⁹

Turning from environmental to political considerations, Valentino’s words ring exceedingly true when considered against the evidence in Chapter Five. When lacking a legitimate mandate, actions that are non-violent *and* indirect will be most effective for complex emergencies. Additionally, rigorous debate and interaction between the White House, Congress, The State Department, and DOD on complex foreign policy issue will optimized the design of any actionable policy. Under Johnson and Nixon, the national security apparatus first appeared to function coldly on economic and alliance interests in the face of an entrenched pro-Nigerian State Department. However, reading Kissinger’s correspondence on NSSM 11 and his phone call transcripts with Senator Kennedy, there appeared to be extensive policy considerations. Taking the military option off the table was not a random red line; instead it was the result of a reasoned and deliberate exploration of the possible effects of an intervention. Leaders realized it would produce a small yield compared to the substantial risks and costs. Operation GALLANT LIFT

⁸ Benjamin A Valentino, “The True Costs of Humanitarian Intervention: The Hard Truth About a Noble Notion.” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2011, Volume 90, No. 6, 62.

⁹ Valentino, 63.

was the only direct use of the US Military in the crisis and it was under a legitimate mandate. Although it was conducted through and with the Nigerian government, after it had won the war, the point is no less salient. The US spent a significant amount of energy lobbying the United Nations for action. The US respected the Organization of African Unity and the UN as the two mechanisms through which a legitimate intervention would have to pass.

Valentino would give high marks for such prudent policymaking by laying out the moral costs of association with the “unsavory behavior of the groups being protected” and that, “Using force to save lives usually involves taking lives, including innocent ones.”¹⁰ Less palpable political costs stem from interventions outside of the UN or regional IGOs and can create a “corrosive effect on the authority of international organizations.”¹¹ Valentino’s relevant recommendation revolves around aiding potential victims of violent conflict.¹² As much debate as there was at the highest levels of the United States Government on how to get food into Biafra there was strikingly little discussion *on how to get starving Biafran civilians out*. Valentino insists, “In practice, measures designed to help victims reach safety across international borders and to care for refugee populations once they arrive have probably saved more lives from conflict than any other form of international intervention.”¹³ Aid distinct from an intervention is not a panacea. Valentino allows for the limited use of military force when such an action (striking roadblocks for example) opens key escape routes. Implications of Valentino’s argument for the US in Syria (and beyond) are to increase support to the UN in its

¹⁰ Valentino, 64.

¹¹ Valentino, 67.

¹² Valentino, 70.

¹³ Valentino, 70.

relief efforts such as the 24 February airdrops to Deir ez-Zor.¹⁴ To reach Deir ez-Zor, the UN chartered a commercial airlifter to conduct airdrops of aid with limited success. The USG could easily provide indirect assistance and technical support to the UN to increase the scale of relief operations to reach besieged populations. The United States Military possesses extensive expertise in airlift and airdrop operations that combine well with its intelligence and growing situational awareness of the Syrian conflict zone.

In his book *The Risk Society at War*, political scientist Dr. Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen explains that Western societies, including the United States, have transitioned from means-end focused cultures to risk societies. The result is that “the best civilian and military national bureaucracy can hope for are actionable scenarios.”¹⁵ In *War from the Ground Up*, former British Infantry officer and Harvard Fellow Emile Simpson senses a similar change in the landscape of conflict and the strategy-policy nexus. Simpson determines globalization and its associated interconnectedness can unhinge the Clausewitzian paradigm of war that requires “polarity between sides (to define an enemy), and the association of strategic audiences with either side (to define the war’s outcome against an enemy).”¹⁶ The consequence of unhooking these baseline assumptions is “the erosion of the distinction between military and political activity.”¹⁷

In the Nigerian Civil War, the position of audience was no small matter for the parties contemplating action in the conflict. The Nigerian

¹⁴ Reuters, “U.N. air drops aid to Syria’s Deir al-Zor; Success Uncertain” February 24, 2016, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-airdrop-idUSKCN0VX21J>

¹⁵ Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen. *The Risk Society at War: Terror, Technology and Strategy in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 203.

¹⁶ Simpson, 67.

¹⁷ Simpson, 68.

Federal Military Government operated strictly within the Clausewitzian paradigm. Its audience was the Biafran fielded forces and its goal was the territorial control of land claimed by the Biafran government. For Biafra their audience was the Western Nigerians and international opinion. Biafran leaders believed that recognition or sympathy abroad would lead to intervention and material support. They matched that grand strategy with an operational “bend but don’t break” approach. The Biafra crisis forced the USG to balance the transmission of its narrative to London and a concerned American public at home. That balancing act was arguably more difficult and consuming than the diplomatic narrative to the actual belligerents in Nigeria. Many of these audiences were beyond the bullets of the conflict but nonetheless affected execution of the war in Nigeria and Biafra.

During the Nigerian Civil War, the United States influenced the conflict in several ways that did not involve applying violence or dispatching military forces. The USG withheld recognition of Biafra, enacted a personal arms embargo to both sides, all the while supporting the airlift of food and medicine into the beleaguered Eastern Province on a grand scale. Looking back, formally employing USAF cargo aircraft into the war zone would have had minimal effects without substantial supporting efforts to alter access to Biafra. On the flip side, there were significant risks—if for example, the Nigerians were to shoot down a USAF operated aircraft—of triggering escalation to a level neither desired nor imagined. Worse yet, the US could have failed to alleviate the suffering despite increased effort and sustained a loss of prestige—a critical element during the Cold War. In effect, the United States applied a cumulative strategy, employing various instruments of national power while engaging in strategic dialogue to determine if a marked change in policy was in order.

It is striking that there *was* strategic dialogue on Biafra considering the US position in Vietnam and the Soviets boldly escalating elsewhere.¹⁸ Indirect support to humanitarian airlift was a realistic and actionable scenario in such a context. American policy maneuvers during the Biafran Crisis provide an extensive model on how to work incremental alterations to policy that result in larger, more beneficial changes over time.¹⁹ Leasing aging USAF aircraft, funneling ever-increasing amounts of cash to the ICRC and JCA, and then culminating with a large DOD airlift postwar were well timed small adjustments that never put US grand interests in a state of peril.

Chapter Five shows that the USG did employ its military airlift capability in a unique way (low visibility paint schemes) once it was again firmly working within an interstate framework after the fall of Biafra. Conventional military operations without a mandate provided by the United Nations, a regional IGO, or at a minimum a sizeable and diverse coalition are significantly circumscribed in today's "politically fragmented, and interpretively unstable" conflicts.²⁰ In Biafra, the USG was able to realize that there were significant cultural obstacles and risks to strategic partnerships if it took unilateral action on a moral basis and shape its response accordingly. Populations caught up in civil war *will* see USAF cargo aircraft as foreign military and any action must account for such a perception.

¹⁸ Simpson describes "proper" strategic dialogue as "the adjustment of policy in light of practical reality in relation to various audiences. Such dialogue should be continuous, as it is in domestic politics; politicians are wary of overly idealistic policy precisely because they understand that it can cause political embarrassment when it fails." Simpson, 126.

¹⁹ Simpson argues that the liberal powers should embrace the stance where "alterations in policy aims are indeed to be avoided if possible on grounds of credibility, but that it is precisely by retaining flexibility, and constantly making small adjustments (which cumulatively, and imperceptibly over time, may add up to a big adjustment), that desire and possibility are kept close." Simpson, 233.

²⁰ Simpson, 89.

The introduction of humanitarian aid into a complex emergency is not necessarily neutral. In fact, this thesis suggests that it can be a significant tool to pressure one side or the other towards the US position or goal in a given context. Unlike bombs or armed soldiers, humanitarian airlift operations to a specific or comprehensive portion of the population are easier to nest within a more appealing grand strategic narrative. Operation GALLANT LIFT, though conducted on Nigerian terms, was still a mechanism for influencing (at least from the USG perspective) the post-war environment in Nigeria by encouraging immediate reconciliation with the former Biafran enclave. Effective solutions in today's conflicts "emphasize pragmatic combinations of means synchronized in time and space to achieve common objectives."²¹ Humanitarian airlift, whether flown by NGOs on recently 'salvaged' USAF aircraft in Biafra or by USAF UCAs in the future, stands as a prominent solution to the merging of political and military means in modern conflict.

On the ground in Syria, the United States faces massive challenges in altering the narrative that is reaching various audiences. Polls taken in the region from December 2015 show a large distrust for all of the foreign powers involved there, including the US.²² The violence has spawned networks that flourish amid the violence between opposing political groups.²³ Such conditions leave "little hope that the current Western strategy to bring about peace has any chance of succeeding. Indeed, a staggering 82 percent of Syrians believe that the U.S. created the Islamic State group."²⁴ In short, the US is spending significant sums

²¹ Simpson, 233.

²² Paul D. Shinkman, "Poll: Syrians, Iraqis Believe U.S. Created ISIS, Don't Support War: U.S. viewed as "radioactive" in region, suggesting the war America and its allies are waging is not likely to succeed," *US News and World Report*, December 18, 2015, available at <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015-12-18/poll-majority-of-syrians-iraqis-dont-support-obamas-anti-isis-war-believe-us-created-extremists>

²³ Shinkman.

²⁴ Shinkman.

of money on a strategy that has negative repercussions, but also does not address the conditions that gave rise to ISIS. A comprehensive humanitarian strategy to increase aid flowing in and people flowing out while simultaneously scaling back kinetic operations to support only those two lines of effort is worth considering. Accordingly, AMC should begin planning now for an Operation GALLANT LIFT-like operation for when peace does come to Syria. The politically fragmented and long nature of the war will make stability and security crucial in the initial aftermath of the war. Access to food goes a long way to assuring both among a decimated population.

Humanitarian Airlift stands as significant tool for the USG to apply to complex emergencies and civil conflicts where it intervenes according to its interests. The Biafran Airlift proved that the United States could influence a conflict from afar with non-violent means—all the while saving the lives of those most affected by the war. Furthermore, the strategic dialogue among US policy makers in the United States led to a pragmatic restraint that ruled out intervention but produced actionable scenarios to save lives *and* retain its interests in the region. Looking back at airlift operations to Biafra with today's emerging technology in mind, there is clearly a shift in possibilities. A capable unmanned cargo aircraft would alter many planning and risk considerations the Department of Defense and the White House faced in the 1960s. Though there was genuine interest with the USG to take greater action on Biafra, the US wisely did not use its conventional military forces given the lack of a UN or OAU mandate. As a precursor to gray zone operations today and in the future, Biafra was an embryonic lesson that the USG, and by extension DOD and the USAF both have been and must be comfortable enabling USAID, NGOs, and PVOs to accomplish their noble humanitarian goals.

Glossary

ACKBA – Amerian Committee to Keep Biafra Alive

AFR – The Africa Bureau

AMC - Air Mobility Command

CONUS – Continental United States

DART – Disaster Assistance Response Team

DCHA - Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance

DCV - Deutscher Caritasverband

DDW - Das Diakonische Werke

DOD – Department of Defense

ECHO - European Union Emergency Office

FFP - Office of Food for Peace

FHA – Foreign Human Assistance

FMG – Federal Military Government of Nigeria

GCC – Geographic Combatant Command

ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross

IFRC – International Federation of the Red Cross

IGO – Intergovernmental Organization

INALWA – International Airlift West Africa

IPC – Interagency Planning Committee

ISIS – The Islamic State

ISR – Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance

JCA – Joint Church Aid

JCS – Joint Chiefs of Staff

JP – Joint Publication

MAC – Military Airlift Command

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NCO – Non-Commissioned Officer

NGO – Nongovernmental Organization

NSC – National Security Council

NSSM – National Security Study Memorandum

OAU - Organization for African Unity

OFDA - Office of Foreign Humanitarian Assistance

OSOCC - On Site Operations and Coordination Center

PRM - Population, Refugee and Migration Bureau

RPA – Remotely Piloted Aircraft

SCM – Supply Chain Management

UAV – Unmanned Aerial Vehicle

UCA – Unmanned Cargo Aircraft

UN – United Nations

UNDAC - United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination

UNDP - United Nations Development Program

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Emergency Fund

UNOCHA - United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

US – United States of America

USAF – United States Air Force

USAID - United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

USG – United States Government

USSOCOM (SOCOM) – United States Special Operations Command

USTRANSCOM – United States Transportation Command

UUV – Unmanned Underwater Vehicle

UGV – Unmanned Ground Vehicle

WCC – World Council of Churches

WFP – World Food Program

WHO – World Health Organization

WWII – World War Two



Bibliography

Academic Papers

Bush, Peter, "Biafra and the Canadian Churches, 1966-1970", *Historical Papers 2003: Canadian Society of Church History*, available at <http://historicalpapers.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/historicalpapers/article/view/39291/35623>

Kapusta, Philip, United States Special Operations Command, White Paper: "The Gray Zone" (9 September 2015), available at <https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/6891151/Gray%20Zones%20-%20USSOCOM%20White%20Paper%209%20Sep%202015.pdf>

Articles

Primary

Borowiec, Andrew "There Is No Elation in Lagos" Washington Star, 18 January 1970.

Borowiec, Andrew "Death, Not Food, Is Awaiting Many Biafran Refugees" Washington Star, 21 January 1970

Borowiec, Andrew "Nigeria Airs Biafra Plan" Washington Star, 29 January 1970.

Lejeve, Ernest W. "The 'Biafra Lobby' and US Foreign Policy" http://worldview.carnegiecouncil.org/archive/worldview/1969/02/1754.html/_res/id=sa_File1/v12_i002_a004.pdf

Kennedy, Edward M., Gidon A. G. Gottlieb, Louis Henkin, Neil Sheehan, Carl E. Taylor, and Beverly May Carl. 1972. "Biafra, Bengal, and Beyond: International Responsibility and Genocidal Conflict." *The American*

Journal of International Law 66 (4): 103-105, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25660441>.

Secondary

Alexander, David, "Stanley McChrystal On Drones: Retired General Cautions Against Overuse Of 'Hated' Strikes," *Huffington Post*, January 7, 2013, available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/08/stanley-mcchrystal-drones_n_2428045.html

Davis, Morris. 1975. "Audits of International Relief in the Nigerian Civil War: Some Political Perspectives". *International Organization* 29 (2). [MIT Press, University of Wisconsin Press, Cambridge University Press, International Organization Foundation]: 501-12.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706366>.

Dillow, Clay, "Battle-tested Marine Corps' drone to hit the commercial market" *Fortune Magazine*, July 17, 2015 available at
<http://fortune.com/2015/07/17/marine-corps-drone-helicopter/>

Goldman, Russel, "Airdrops Called Too Risky a Way to Help Starving Syrians," January 19th 2016 *The New York Times*, available at
<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/20/world/middleeast/airdrops-called-too-risky-a-way-to-help-starving-syrians.html>

Gourevitch, Philip. "Alms Dealers: Can You Provide Humanitarian Aid without Facilitating Conflicts?" *The New Yorker*. 11 Oct. 2010, available at
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/11/alms-dealers>

Jacobsen, Mark, Uplift Aeronautics Final Letter, Posted on December 31, 2015 by Uplift Aeronautics, <http://uplift.aero/?p=324>

Laub, Karin, "Siege Warfare in Syria Revives debate over Ancient Tactic." *Associated Press*, February 17, 2016, available at

<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/859b168c4d6b493bb803bb78dd8fe091/siege-warfare-syria-revives-debate-over-ancient-tactic>

McNeil, Brian, “‘And starvation is the grim reaper’: the American Committee to Keep Biafra Alive and the genocide question during the Nigerian civil war, 1968–70, *Journal of Genocide Research*, Volume 16 Issue 2-3, August 21, 2014 available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2014.936723>

Reuters, “U.N. air drops aid to Syria's Deir al-Zor; Success Uncertain” February 24, 2016, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-airdrop-idUSKCN0VX21J>

Shinkman, Paul D. “Poll: Syrians, Iraqis Believe U.S. Created ISIS, Don’t Support War: U.S. viewed as “radioactive” in region, suggesting the war America and its allies are waging is not likely to succeed.” *US News and World Report*, December 18, 2015, available at <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015-12-18/poll-majority-of-syrians-iraqis-dont-support-obamas-anti-isis-war-believe-us-created-extremists>

United States Department of Defense, “Operation INHERENT RESOLVE: Targeted Operations Against ISIL Terrorists” http://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0814_Inherent-Resolve

USAID, Ongoing USG Humanitarian Assistance Syria - Complex Emergency Last Updated 02/04/16, available at https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/syria_map_02-04-2016.pdf

Valentino, Benjamin A. “The True Costs of Humanitarian Intervention: The Hard Truth About a Noble Notion.” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2011, Volume 90, No. 6. Available at

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2011-10-17/true-costs-humanitarian-intervention>

Western, Jon “Sources of Humanitarian Intervention: Beliefs, Information, and Advocacy in the U.S. Decisions on Somalia and Bosnia,” *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Spring 2002), pp. 112-142 available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3092104>

Wintour, Patrick “Delivering aid should not need Syrian regime's approval, says MP: Labour’s Jo Cox says UK should impress on UN agencies delivering aid that they only need notify Damascus rather than seek permission” January 22, 2016 available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/22/un-aid-agencies-do-not-need-syrian-governments-approval-to-deliver-aid-says-mp>

Books

Arinze, Josh, *Moral Anguish: Richard Nixon and the Challenge of Biafra*. July 4, 2011, Kindle Edition.

Baxter, Peter. *Biafra: the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970*. Africa@war Series, Vol. 16, Solihull, West Midlands, England: Helion & Company Limited, 2014.

Byrne, Tony. *Airlift to Biafra: Breaching the Blockade*. Dublin, Ireland: Columba Press, 1997.

Cohen, Eliot A. *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime*, New York: Anchor Books, 2003

de St Jorre, John *The Brothers' War: Biafra and Nigeria*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972, 148.

Draper, Michael I. *Shadows: Airlift and Airwar in Biafra and Nigeria, 1967-1970*. Aldershot, Hants England: Hikoki Publications, ©1999.

Ekeh, Peter “Citizenship and Political Conflict: A Sociological Interpretation of the Nigerian Crisis”, In Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies, vol. 12, *Nigeria: Dilemma of Nationhood: an African Analysis of the Biafran Conflict* (New York: Third Press, 1972), edited by Joseph Ohiomogben Okpaku

Explanatory Note Attached to Decree No. 8 of 1967, Constitution (Suspension and Modification), Supplement to the Official Gazette of the Federation of Nigeria, vol. 54, from A H M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook* London: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Franks, Suzanne. *Reporting Disasters: Famine, Aid, Politics and the Media*. London: Hurst, 2013.

Gould, Michael. International Library of African Studies. Vol. 35, *The Struggle for Modern Nigeria: The Biafran War, 1967-1970*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2012.

Kirk-Greene, A H M. *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook*. London: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Miller, Roger G. *To Save a City: The Berlin Airlift, 1948-1949*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 1998.

Niven, Rex. *The War of Nigerian Unity, 1967-1970*. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1971, 1970.

Obasanjo, Olusegun. *My Command: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970*. Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980.

Ojukwu, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu. *Biafra: Selected Speeches and Random Thoughts of C. Odumegwu Ojukwu*. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

Okpaku, Joseph Ohiomogben. Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies,. Vol. 12, *Nigeria: Dilemma of Nationhood: an African Analysis of the Biafran Conflict*. New York: Third Press, 1972.

Oyinbo, John. *Nigeria: Crisis and Beyond*. London: C. Knight, 1971.

Rasmussen, Mikkel Vedby. *The Risk Society at War: Terror, Technology and Strategy in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Simpson, Emile. *War from the Ground Up: Twenty-First Century Combat as Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Siollun, Max. *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture (1966-1976)*. New York: Algora Publishers, 2009.

Briefings/Point Papers/Memos/Messages

Rudin, A. James, Two Memoranda Regarding Leasing of Aircraft for Airlift Relief Efforts. (Nov. 14, 1968) AJC Digital Archives available at <http://ajcarchives.org/ajcarchive/DigitalArchive.aspx>

Government Documents

Primary

Foreign Relations of The United States 1964–1968 Volume XXIV, Africa, Document 402

Foreign Relations of The United States 1969–1976 VOLUME E–5, PART 1, Documents On Sub-Saharan Africa, 1969–1972.

History of Military Airlift Command, Volume I, 30 June 1970, (All citations and references were from unclassified paragraphs, overall document classification is FOUO).

Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives Ninety-First Congress, First Session. April 24, 1969, (Statement before the Senate Subcommittee for African Affairs, 4 October 1968).

Hearings Before The Subcommittee To Investigate Problems Connected with Refugees and Escapees of The Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate, Ninety-First Congress, Second Session – Part 2. January 21-22, 1970.

Executive Office of the President of the United States of America, *National Security Strategy* (2015), available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf

Haulman, Daniel L. (Office of Air Force History and U.S. Air Force, The United States Air Force and Humanitarian Airlift Operations 1947-1994 (2015), available at <http://www.afhso.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-101001-058.pdf>

Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group XVI Meeting, November 30, 1994 “Definition Complex Emergency”, available at https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/legacy_files/WG16_4.pdf

Kerry, John “Remarks at the Ministerial Meeting of the Small Group of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL,” available at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2016/02/251992.htm>

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) Field Handbook*, 6th Edition, 2013.

The Department of Defense, *The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review* (2014), available at http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/2014_Quadrennial_Defense_Review.pdf

The Sphere Project: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response. Rugby: The Sphere Project, 2011, available at <http://www.sphereproject.org/handbook/>

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Oslo Guidelines: Guidelines on The Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets In Disaster Relief, Revision 1.1* November 2007, available at [https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/Oslo%20Guidelines%20ENGLISH%20\(November%202007\).pdf](https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/Oslo%20Guidelines%20ENGLISH%20(November%202007).pdf)

USAID ADS 251: International Disaster Assistance, United States Agency for International Development, available at <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/251.pdf>

USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Response Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, “Strategic Plan” 1996.

USAID “Policy On Cooperation With The Department of Defense”, June 2015, available at <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAIDPolicyCooperationDoD.pdf>

USAID/OFDA Field Operations Guide for Disaster Assessment and Response available at https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/fog_v4_0.pdf

US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Foreign Humanitarian Assistance, Joint Publication 3-29* (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, January 3, 2014), available at http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_29.pdf

US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Security Operations in Theater, Joint Publication 3-10* (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, November 14, 2014), available at http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_10.pdf

Personal Communications

Primary

Conversation between Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon. Transcript of conversation. 18 Jul. 1969. “Document 90.” U.S. Department of State: Office of the Historian.

Moments in U.S. Diplomatic History, “The Famine in Biafra — USAID’s Response to the Nigerian Civil War,” available at <http://adst.org/2014/05/the-famine-in-biafra-usaids-response-to-the-nigerian-civil-war/>

U.S. Department of State in a letter to Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, director interreligious affairs, explains that it cannot comply with requests that two Hercules aircraft be made available for an airlift. Gaud, William S. (Oct. 24, 1968) AJC Digital Archives <http://ajcarchives.org/ajcarchive/DigitalArchive.aspx>

Reports

Primary

International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 100, September 1969, 459-513, available at https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/RC_Sep-1969.pdf

International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 99, June 1969, 287-337, available at https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/RC_Jun-1969.pdf

International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 98, July 1969, 343-392, available at https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/RC_Jul-1969.pdf

International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 97, April 1969, 173-221, available at https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/RC_Apr-1969.pdf

International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 96, March 1969, 119-172, available at https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/RC_Mar-1969.pdf

International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 95, February 1969, 60-110, available at https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/RC_Feb-1969.pdf

International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 94, January 1969, 1-53, available at https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/RC_Jan-1969.pdf

International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 93, December 1968, 611-649, available at https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/RC_Dec-1968.pdf

International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 91, October 1968, 503-550.
https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/RC_Oct-1968.pdf

International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 90, September 1968, 447-497,
available at https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/RC_Sep-1968.pdf

International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 89, August 1968, 395-439,
available at https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/RC_Aug-1968.pdf

International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 88, July 1968, 343-390,
available at https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/RC_Jul-1968.pdf

[International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 86, May 1968, 227-276,
available at https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/RC_May-1968.pdf](https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/RC_May-1968.pdf)

International Review of the Red Cross, Issue No. 78, September 1967, 459-508,
available at https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/RC_Sep-1967.pdf

Neylon, Pat, "Official Report: Accident Of VL-BCY - DC-7C SER. 45545 at Uli
Airport Biafra On December 8th, at Approximately 00:55 HR Biafra
Time," available at <http://www.patneylon.com/index.php/biafra/official-report>

Secondary

William L. Nash and Ciara Knudsen. "Reform and Innovation in Stabilization,
Reconstruction and Development". Princeton Project on National
Security, available at
<https://www.princeton.edu/~ppns/papers/reconstruction.pdf>